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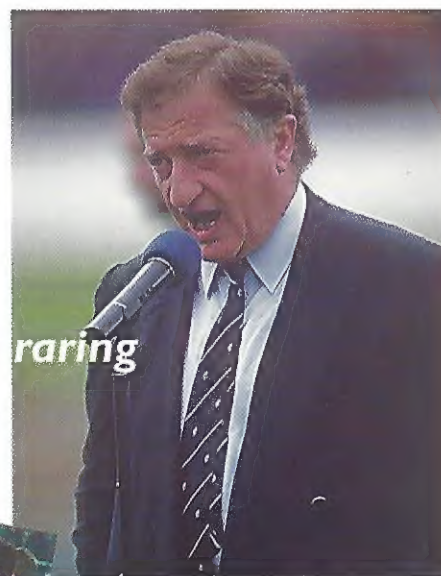
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IT'S UP FOR GRABS

The 1996-97 Ericsson Cup competition kicks off with new teams from Perth and Collingwood.

Ray Gatt looks at the chances of all 14 clubs.

Enough of this madness... let's play some football! Why is it whenever our great game looks as though it is starting to make in-roads into the Australian sporting culture we, no, make that our administrators, find a way to stuff up?

We had the debacle before the start of last season when Soccer Australia chose to ignore the constitution in an attempt to kick out three clubs.

The game itself was pushed into the background for several months as the affected clubs and SA became involved in a nasty confrontation.

With SA likely to be beaten in the courts, it needed an extraordinary general meeting of stakeholders, which decided to change the constitution, to bail SA chairman David Hill out of the you-know-what.

Not content with learning the lesson, SA embarked on a similar course of controversy and acrimony recently when it attempted to force clubs to change their playing-strip logos.

When we should have been focusing on the players, the Johnnie Walker Cup and the start of a new season, we were instead again thrust into turmoil.

This was done in the name of a so-called National Merchandising Plan, which SA said would be seriously affected if clubs did not change their "symbols of European nationalism".

Now SA will say they won this little battle with Marconi Fairfield, Sydney United, Melbourne

Knights and Adelaide City agreeing to change their emblems. But it really wasn't a victory.

Marconi's **Dominic Longo**, **Goran Lozanovski** of Collingwood Warriors (centre) and Adelaide City veteran **Milan Ivanovic** (far right) should be prominent figures in this season's Ericsson Cup.



Look at Marconi. Their logo – a world globe with a communications tower and boomerang – is exactly the same except that the red, white and green colours are now no longer incorporated in the boomerang.

Instead, the Italian colours are now even more predominant around the emblem. Who's laughing now?

So what was the fuss about?

All that happened was that Hill and his job succeeded in drawing the attention away from the game itself and put Australian soccer into the news for all the wrong reasons.

Of course, the media lapped up the controversy, which divided the sport and even forced politicians from all persuasions to get involved.

Once again, Australian soccer shot itself in the foot. Will we ever learn? Unlikely. Anyway, now that the dust has settled on yet

another disastrous off-season, it is time to get our teeth into the real business – playing the game.

So what will the new Ericsson Cup season bring? Can Melbourne Knights make it three in a row? Can Marconi make up for their grand final defeat? How will Frank Farina cope with his debut as a national league coach? Will we see the emergence of some more exciting, young talent?

Two new teams – Perth Glory and Collingwood Warriors – have been added to the competition, which has grown from 12 teams last season to 14.

But can Australian soccer sustain so many teams? Remember, Carlton will come into the competition for the 1997-98 season. That means another team will also be included to make it a 16-team competition. Conversely, one side might be dropped to

leave the championship at 14 teams.

Coincidentally, it would be a good idea if SA could tell us quickly what their plans are for the 1997-98 Ericsson Cup instead of leaving everything until the last minute. It is my belief that the sport cannot sustain a 14-team competition, let alone 16. With more and more great talent heading overseas, there are simply not enough good players to go around here.

The standard of football in the Ericsson Cup will drop. Let's face it, the standard hasn't been that great in recent seasons and, unfortunately, this season won't be any different.

I believe the championship will be a tight contest with very little separating most of the top teams.

Even at this early stage, the Knights, Marconi, UTS Olympic, Sydney United, Adelaide City and South Melbourne – not in



any particular order – are my picks to fill the top six.

West Adelaide will be thereabouts as will newcomers Collingwood Warriors, but the Brisbane Strikers, despite the still exceptional skills of Farina and making the finals last season, are going to find it tougher.

Forget the rest. Gippsland Falcons, Perth Glory, Wollongong City, Canberra Cosmos and Newcastle Breakers are only making up the numbers.

Perth's entry is long overdue. As those of you who have read this magazine over the years will know, I have been pushing for Perth's inclusion for many years.

I'd love to see them do well under Gary Marocchi. While they should do so at home, I fear they'll run into problems in their away games. They'll struggle because of a lack of top quality personnel.

The Glory have recruited Vinko Buljubasic from the Melbourne Knights, but have otherwise found it difficult to attract high profile players from the eastern states. The core of the squad will be made up of local players headed by the likes of the Naven brothers – Craig and Gareth – Dale Wingell and former Young Socceroo goalkeeper Vince Matassa.

Collingwood have had much better luck in their recruitment drive. Undoubtedly, the thought of playing under that superb coach and tactician Zoran Matic has been an enticing lure to players.

Matic, who had so much success with Adelaide City and is fresh from a year out of the game, has had to build from scratch with the Warriors. He hasn't done a bad job so far in snaring the likes of Con Boutsianis, Goran Lozanovski, John Waddell, Dean Anastasiadis, Kimon Taliadoros, George Jolevski, Ernie Tapai and Carlo Talladira.

Still, it would be asking too much for the Warriors to be regarded as a serious championship threat.

As for the others:

MELBOURNE KNIGHTS: Losing dynamo Danny Tiatto (Switzerland) is a huge blow, but, as they showed last season when they lost Mark Viduka and Steve Horvat, this club is capable of overcoming enormous odds.

They have also lost Joe Bacak to Dutch club Vitesse Arnhem and Buljubasic to Perth.

GIPPSLAND FALCONS: Have a new coach in Frank Arok and have done well to grab Eddie Krncevic, who spent most of his career playing in Europe.

Arok has a big job ahead as the club has lost the likes of Sonny Sevin (Wollongong), Warren Spink (South Melbourne), Tapai and Waddell (Warriors).



Andrew Harper (Marconi)

The Falcons will struggle, especially if they get a few injuries.

UTS OLYMPIC: Soccer Australia will again look to a good season from them to bolster the crowd figures.

Olympic coach David Ratcliffe has bought wisely in the off-season, grabbing young Brett Emerton, veteran Jim Patikas (Sydney United), Steve Refenes, who is back after a number of seasons in Europe, and goalkeeper Tony Franken.

The Blues, who have lost Taliadoros, Mike Gibson, Robbie Ironside (Newcastle) and Chris Slater, have a good squad and will again thrive under Ratcliffe's astute coaching.

MARCONI: Have retained almost all their players, while signing speedy striker Sean

Babic (Sydney United) and classy midfielder Craig Foster (Adelaide City).

As usual, coach Manfred Schaefer will have them the fittest side in the early stages of the competition with a recent trip to China helping considerably. Don't be surprised if a couple of their championship winning youth team force their way into the firsts, notably Andrew Ravanello.

The Stallions will again be fighting for the title.

BRISBANE STRIKERS: New coach Frank Farina takes over from Bruce Stowell, who took them to the finals last year. The big question is - can Frank handle the captain-coach responsibilities?

Despite Frank's undoubted credentials, the



Tony Popovic (Sydney United)

club is unlikely to scale the same heights as last season. They've lost Steve Jackson, Chris Brichich and Jason Polak, with the loss of Polak a real blow. Once again Farina will be a on-field force and he'll look to the likes of Ian Hunter, Rod Brown and the Cranney brothers – Sean and Troy – to help what will musically be a young squad.

WOLLONGONG CITY: Coach Nick Theodorakopoulos and assistant Ron Corry did a good job when they took over midway through last season. He has been busy in the transfer market, signing the more than capable Johnny Sevin (Gippsland), George Haniotis (West Adelaide), Michael Reda and Nicola Pavesevski.

They have enough quality players to make

some sort of noise this season, but a finals position looks just out of reach.

SOUTH MELBOURNE: New coach and nice guy Angie Postecoglou will do a great job here after taking over from Frank Arok. The former South Melbourne defender and Soccerroo has served his apprenticeship and deserves his chance.

They are another club SA hopes does well because of their huge following.

The Lakers have made some important signings in Soccerroos Warren Spink and Jason Polak as well as Ivan Kelic and David Clarkson.

Those signings, coupled with stalwarts like Paul Trimboli and Mike Petersen as well as Vaughan Coveny and young guns Daniel Allsopp, Tansel Baser, Michael Curcija and Bill

Damianos give them an impressive array of talent. They'll be the big improvers this season.

SYDNEY UNITED: Such a talented club, but they seem to suffer at finals time. Branko Culina has done a great job to get them to the finals for the last couple of seasons and there is no reason why they shouldn't figure again.

While welcomed, the likely return of Soccerroo goalkeeper Zeljko Kalac from England complicates things for the club as they signed goalkeeper Peter Blazincic from West Adelaide and also have John Perosh on the books. They have also signed midfielder John Didulica from North Geelong.

But they have lost Jim Patikas to Olympic and, as usual, the lack of strike power up front could again be a problem for the Pumas.

NEWCASTLE: Poor John Kosmina. The club has little money to spend on players which means Kossie has to work under enormous difficulties.

The signing of the experienced Robbie Ironside will help, but you cannot rely on one player. Kosmina needs at least four quality players to help veteran David Lowe and to mix with some excellent young talent like Troy Halpin, Harry James and Clayton Zane.

They'll cause an upset or two but I can't see them getting higher than mid-table, which is a shame because Newcastle are capable of attracting big crowds with a winning team.

ADELAIDE CITY: John Nyskohus has the hardest job in Australian soccer... following in the footsteps of Zoran Matic and John Perin.

No Goran Lozanovski or Craig Foster and that leaves a gaping hole in the Zebras' squad, though they have signed striker Michael Musitano from Canberra.

Still, any side with Jason Petkovic, Milan Ivanovic, Alex Tobin and Damian Mori in it can never be underestimated.

CANBERRA: Coach Mick Lyons did a top job under the circumstances last season, but he'll need to be a genius to lift the club from near the bottom of the table this season.

They've lost some good young players in Musitano and Alex Castro (West Adelaide) while Marco Perinovic and Jason Dunn have been shown the door.

There has been a shift of administrative power in Canberra and I hope these highly capable people can turn things around for them.

WEST ADELAIDE: Another club with a new coach in Adrian Santrac, who takes over from Raul Blanco. Santrac has served his apprenticeship and I'm sure he'll do a good job.

Have signed Alex Castro from Canberra and Jamie Perin from Adelaide City, but otherwise they have been relatively quiet in the transfer market. ■

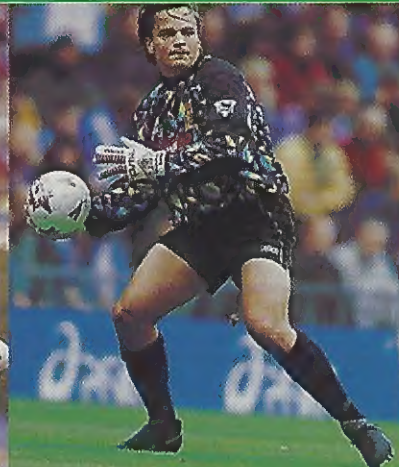
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South Melbourne unveils new image

South Melbourne will enter the 1996-97 Ericsson Cup with an overhauled image, including a new logo, new name and new strip. The logo and jersey, revealed last month, have been well received by fans and the local soccer fraternity.

The team will be referred to as the Lakers, giving the club a "US basketball" feel which is likely to attract attention from younger soccer fans. The new logo also sports a chequered flag, symbolic of the Melbourne Grand Prix which is held at Albert Park, literally alongside the Lakeside Stadium.

No doubt the powers-that-be at the Lakers will be hoping the Grand Prix lasts longer in Melbourne than it did in Adelaide.

The nickname was chosen after exhaustive research among the club's supporters, especially its younger fans, who have been looking for a more contemporary look from their beloved team.

The official name of the club remains 'South Melbourne Soccer Club'. The Lakers have already made it clear they don't want to be referred to as South Melbourne Lakers.

On the field, South Melbourne has been busy trying to establish a squad capable of challenging for major honours. Jason Polak returns to the club after one season with the Brisbane Strikers, while fellow Socceroo and Gippsland Falcons (formerly Morwell) striker Warren Spink has also joined the Lakers.

But the changes don't stop there. Former South hero Angie Postecoglou has been appointed coach of the senior side following the departure of Frank Arok, who has since found a new position at the helm of the Gippsland Falcons.

One of Postecoglou's first acts has been to appoint two other former South Melbourne champions to his staff. The club's games record holder, Steve Blair, has been handed the team manager role, while Carl Halford has been named assistant coach.

Perth gets into gear

Whatever their inaugural Ericsson Cup season holds for Perth Glory, they'll be unlikely to find tougher opponents than they chose for the club's first official game.

Italian giants Sampdoria provided a stern test for the fledgling side in front of an 11,000 crowd at the W.A.C.A. ground on 31 May. Unsurprisingly the Serie A outfit, inspired by Roberto Mancini, won 3-0, but it was nonetheless an exciting day for the new club.

Sydney United's Ante Milicic and Collingwood Warrior new boy, Kimon Taliadoros were guest players for the home side, and the club held transfer discussions with both after the game.

Although neither of the two signed on the dotted line for the Perth club, others have already committed themselves to the West Australian cause, including Scott Miller from



Gippsland Falcons, Melbourne Knights' Vinko Buljubasic, Young Socceroo goalkeeper Vince Matassa and Dale Wingell, brother of former Young Socceroo, Marc.

The search for a suitable home ground has been a drawn-out process, according to Roger Lefort, general manager of the Glory. "To say we experienced difficulties finding a ground would be an understatement," he admits. "The need for floodlights obviously created problems with local councils."

In spite of these difficulties, Perth Glory has announced it will be playing its home games at Perth Oval, home of East Perth Football Club. The ground capacity will be approximately 10,000, including 6,000 seats.

The club is raring to go and their national league baptism on 12 October against UTS Olympic will be an historic moment for Australian soccer. "We've attracted a certain amount of curiosity from the sporting public," Lefort says enthusiastically, "and we're hopeful of getting a crowd in excess of 10,000 for

Patikas joins UTS Olympic



The return of Jim Patikas to Australian soccer earlier this year with Sydney United was an anti-climax to those who remember his many exciting performances for the Socceroos in the mid '80s. But a close-season transfer across town to UTS Olympic may well revitalise the career of the former AEK Athens star.

"He's an ex-international, he's a professional and we think that if we get him in the box he'll score goals," Olympic's assistant coach Steve Darby told Soccer Australia.

"We're looking to play him just behind Kris Trajanovski, who's been top class, or he may be up front with Trajanovski."

Patikas, who played against Inter Milan in the 1988 UEFA Cup during his AEK days, isn't the only big name signing with a successful stint in Greece on his CV. Steve Refenes, a member of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic team, returns from Greek club, Elefsina, to resume his national league career.

"Steve's still got his lightning pace, but he's got a lot tougher," says Darby. "He can handle knocks now that he couldn't have handled four years ago. He's a tougher player mentally and physically."

Ex-Socceroo goalkeeper Tony Franken has also arrived at the club to add his experi-

ence to the squad, but Darby points out that Olympic won't solely be depending on seasoned professionals in their search for glory in 1996-97.

"There are six teenagers in the 20 man squad including Brett Emerton, who we think is a star of the future, and Ivan Zelic, who's now cemented his spot as sweeper.

"David (coach Ratcliffe) is trying to get a blend of youth and experience, to use the cliché."

Soccer Radio National

Aussie soccer fans looking to keep up to date with the progress of their favourite Ericsson Cup team need look no further than the Soccer Radio National programmes.

Soccer Radio National currently produces three programmes -

'Match of the Day' on both Saturday and Sunday nights features a three hour live broadcast of matches from almost all Ericsson Cup venues, as well as international games and Ericsson Cup finals fixtures. From 6.30 pm to 9.30 pm.

'Boots and Balls' on Wednesday nights is a programme featuring news and interviews, covering all the latest issues in the soccer world. From 8.30 pm to 9.30 pm.

Soccer Radio National programmes are transmitted to over 80 radio stations around Australia. Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, Newcastle, Morwell and Cairns are on line so far, with other city and country centres soon to follow. ■

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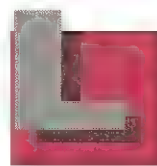


FALCONS READY TO FLY



New Falcons coach Frank Arok (centre) is flanked by star striker Eddie Krncevic (left) and President Fred Di Santo (right).

Two Australian soccer legends are joining forces to revitalise the club formerly known as Morwell Falcons. Laurie Schwab explains.



isten to the story of the new-look, renamed Gippsland Falcons and you instantly become a fan. The plot, the people and the possibilities are irresistible.

With a new name that stretches the Falcons' wings beyond their Morwell base, comes the entirely appropriate association with two men of broad horizons - Frank Arok and Eddie Krncevic.

From them radiates the enthusiasm, energy and sense of adventure that has permeated all levels of the club.

B

etween seasons, the Falcons lost 11 players including

Scott Miller, Warren Spink, Sonny Sevin, Brian Bothwell, Carlo Talladira, Ernie Tapai and David Clarkson.

Yet Arok kicked off the Falcons' 1996-97 campaign with a 2-1 first-round Johnnie Walker Cup victory against South Melbourne, the club that sacked him near the end of last season.

His Falcons team at the Lakeside Stadium included another who had been sacked by South - striker Alex Djuric. After failing to live down a disastrous debut as stopper with South Melbourne, he moved to Victorian Premier League club Port Melbourne, where Arok joined him shortly afterwards.

At South, after a lengthy absence from soccer, Djuric clearly had not been ready. Now he is showing the qualities that made him successful in Bosnia and Hungary.

He made his senior debut at 17 as striker for Bosnia's Sloga Doboj in the Yugoslav first division and scored about a dozen goals in each of three seasons before moving to Hungary, where he spent two seasons with Szeged and one with Tot Comosh.

In his first season with Szeged, he notched a remarkable 18 goals in 11 matches to finish as league top-scorer.

It is because of the war that Djuric is in Australia. His mother, Nada, was killed by a grenade in Doboj, their home town, near the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo. His partner, Lana Makarevic, is a muslim. "We have come here looking for peace and to get as far away as possible from the fighting," he said. "Everything is bombed. We will not go back."

Another new player who made an instant impression was New Zealand international Mark Foy, a 21-year-old right flanker or striker recommended to Arok by Kevin Hagan, who played under Arok at St George in Sydney and is now coaching in the New Zealand national league.

But the best of them all was Clayton Bell, Australia's captain in the 1995 World Under 17 Championship in Ecuador. Originally with Frankston Pines and then Port Melbourne, Bell eclipsed his direct opponent, Paul Trimboli, and also exerted enormous



Gippsland Falcons goalkeeper, Jim K... ..

Henry Velkovski and perhaps Zdravko Atanasovski from Altona Magic. Stopper Mark Gotis, Gippsland-based although he played for Port Melbourne, also was recuperating from injury. Fijian internationals Esala Masi and Manoa Masi were completing a tournament in Suva before returning to Australia.

And Arok had also asked Billy Wright to return - as a sweeper - once he is available in December. Wright, who helped New Zealand knock Australia out of the 1989 World Cup qualifying series, left Morwell two years ago to play for State League club South Dandenong, where he has twice been league top-scorer.

THE AROK FACTOR

It could be argued that under Arok, Port Melbourne was the best team of the 1996 Victorian Premier League. It lost only three of 16 games

influence all over the field.

Nick Palamaras, from Port Melbourne, again strolled through the match as sweeper with ridiculous ease, having done it in another victory over South Melbourne in a practice match a few weeks earlier.

Yet another of Arok's Port Melbourne proteges, Will Hastie, demonstrated that his time in the national league has finally come.

A former Croydon City junior, Hastie took up a two-year apprenticeship with Glasgow Celtic after playing for Australia in the 1989 World Under 16 Championship in Scotland.

He then played for Dundee in the company of fellow Victorian Lachlan Armstrong, now with Canberra Cosmos.

Next came a two-season stint as a first-team regular with Irish club Sligo, the highlight of which was winning the Irish Cup and qualifying for the European Cup Winners' Cup.

But on his return to Melbourne last year, he failed in an attempt to join Sydney United, was discarded after a stint with Canberra Cosmos and played briefly with Heidelberg United before benefiting from Arok's encouragement at Port.

But what we saw at the Bob Jane Stadium was only the beginning. Claudio Canosa and Doug Marcina had yet to return from injury; striker Vlad Babic and perhaps goalkeeper Chris Vella were due from Green Gully and

under him, beat four of the eventual five finalists - Heidelberg United 3-1, Altona Magic 3-0, Sunshine-George Cross 5-2, Bentleigh Greens 3-1 - and drew with the other finalist, Green Gully, 1-1. With 59 goals, Port was the second-highest scoring team in the league yet when Arok joined the club, it was under threat of relegation.

Arok's other exploits are well documented - Ericsson Cup championships with Marconi and St George, the Johnnie Walker Cup and Dockerty Cup with South Melbourne and a record seven-year stint as national coach, spanning two World Cup qualifying campaigns and an Olympic Games.

His pre-season training was based principally on repetitions with the ball. "I want to make everyone a better player so that come mid-October, God help any team that comes to play in Morwell," he said.

He conceded that he had no recognised midfield playmaker but it did not worry him. "Port Melbourne didn't have a midfield leader either but they still played better than anyone else," he said. "It just means that everyone in the midfield has to contribute in a special way - to get the ball to the strikers without fuss and support quickly. I'm adamant that Carlo Villani or Alex Djuric can be a very damaging striker from the second line."

Arok stressed that Argentine strongman

Ex-Socceroo striker **Eddie Krncevic** - back in town with the Gippsland Falcons

Claudio Canosa still has an important role to play even though he had trouble gaining regular selection in the second half of last season.

"If he plays in front of a sweeper, he'll still kill any opponent," Arok said. "But playing in a flat back four last season wasn't his cup of tea. When we play at home, Canosa will be a pain to everyone with his aerial power at corners and free kicks."

"He's one of our many big guys who will raise hell when they move up into the penalty area - Krncevic, Palamaras, Djuric, Mangos, Douglas."

On the playing field, Canosa, 30, is positively fearsome - tall as a tree with a fiery red crown, eyes piercing, voice husky and crackling.

In Argentina, Canosa had five years with Racing of Buenos Aires and played on loan to Athletic the season it won promotion to the first division. He also had a stint with Santa Cruz in Bolivia.

At Racing, his team-mates included Argentine World Cup players Jorge Olarticochea and Gabriel Calderon and his coaches included the highly-regarded Jose Santiago and Jorge Garcia.

New Zealand international Sean Douglas also had a taste of professional soccer with Danish first division club Lyngby, in the company of international centre-back Claus Christianssen and Henrik Larssen, who was top scorer in the Denmark team that won the 1992 European Championship.

THE KRNCVIC FACTOR

Eddie Krncevic, 36, ranks among the finest players Australia has produced. Born in Geelong, he was a prolific striker for the Melbourne Knights and Marconi, played in Australia's 1979 World Youth Championship campaign and scored 18 goals in 36 games for the Socceroos.

Australian soccer's talent drain started in 1982 when Krncevic joined Dinamo Zagreb of Croatia and became the first Australian to play in a European first division.

Hundreds of Australians joined the exodus as Krncevic moved on to MSV Duisburg of Germany, Cercle Bruges, Anderlecht, FC Liege, Aalst and Charleroi



of Belgium and Mulhouse of France, scoring a total of about 180 goals.

Three times he was top scorer of Anderlecht and once top scorer of the Belgian league.

His team-mates included a who's who of international soccer - Enzo Scifo, Frankie Vercauteren, Georges Grun, Adri van Tiggelen (Anderlecht); Manfred Kaltz, Blaz Sliskovic, Nenad Stojkovic (Mulhouse) and Zambian international Bywala Kalusha (Cercle Bruges).

His coaches included the great Arie Haan and Raymond Goethals at Anderlecht, Jan Ceulemans at Aalst and Luka Peruzovic at Charleroi.

When Krncevic first joined Dinamo Zagreb, Zvonimir Boban and Robert Prosinecki, then eager 11-year-olds, crossed the ball for him at training. Boban is with AC Milan now, Prosinecki with Barcelona. Both rank among the best players in the world.

Krncevic returned to Australia earlier this year with the intention of taking up coaching, having gained his FIFA coaching accreditation in Belgium.

But after failing to land jobs with the Collingwood Warriors, South Melbourne and Brisbane Strikers, he accepted Arok's offer to lead the Gippsland attack.

"No-one would give me an opportunity

in coaching, perhaps because I've been away too long. So I've got to start from scratch. By playing with the Falcons, people will get to know me again.

"Frank signed me as a leader and to set an example to the others, so it's very important for me to play well.

"I didn't do anything for six months but I handled the pre-season OK, the training's been very interesting and Frank is the consummate professional from whom I can learn a lot. It's a great challenge."

"Krncevic is the catalyst," Arok remarked. "He is not only a great player but he has the personality that lifts everyone around him - very positive, very kind, very helpful."

On his return to Melbourne after scoring seven goals in 14 games for his last Belgian club, Charleroi, Krncevic attracted media attention for his comments about what he perceived to be the generally poor diet of Australian

players.

Krncevic swears by fruit - especially first thing in the morning, on an empty stomach, to clear out toxins from the day before.

For lunch, he has salad, rice or a salad sandwich. The evening meal is also light - chicken and vegetables, for instance, "not chicken and potato, because that combination won't pass through the system efficiently.

"I try to avoid red meat altogether because it's the worst thing for a sportsman. bad for the muscles," he said. "I also avoid junk food, except maybe once a week when I might have fish and chips with the kids.

"In general, I don't eat much and I try to follow the golden rule: don't eat after 8pm because your body needs time to digest your food.

"Remember: you are what you eat."

In his first match, against South Melbourne, Krncevic scored from the penalty spot but was given precious few other chances by those around him.

That will change. "Krncevic is there to put away the chances, so the others have to deliver," Arok said. "I want five good balls for him in every half." ■

ROUND	DATE	HOME TEAM		VISITORS	GROUND	KICK OFF	ROUND	DATE	HOME TEAM
1	11/10/96 FRI	Newcastle Breakers	v	West Adelaide	Breakers Stadium	07:30pm	9	08/12/96 SUN	Sydney United
1	12/10/96 SAT	Canberra Cosmos	v	Marconi Fairfield	Bruce Stadium	07:00pm	10	14/12/96 FRI	Marconi Fairfield
1	12/10/96 SAT	Gippsland Falcons	v	South Melbourne	Falcons Park	07:30pm	10	14/12/96 FRI	Perth Glory
1	13/10/96 SUN	Perth Glory	v	UTS Olympic	Perth Oval	04:00pm	10	14/12/96 FRI	Canberra Cosmos
1	13/10/96 SUN	Adelaide City	v	Brisbane Strikers	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	10	14/12/96 FRI	Gippsland Falcons
1	13/10/96 SUN	Collingwood Warriors	v	Melbourne Knights	Victoria Park	04:30pm	10	15/12/96 SAT	UTS Olympic
1	13/10/96 SUN	Sydney United	v	Wollongong City	Sydney Utd Spt Centre	06:30pm	10	15/12/96 SAT	West Adelaide
							10	15/12/96 SAT	Collingwood Warriors
2	19/10/96 SAT	Brisbane Strikers	v	Newcastle Breakers	Suncorp Stadium	07:00pm	11	20/12/96 FRI	Wollongong City
2	19/10/96 SAT	Marconi Fairfield	v	Collingwood Warriors	Marconi Stadium	07:00pm	11	20/12/96 FRI	Newcastle Breakers
2	20/10/96 SUN	South Melbourne	v	Sydney United	Bob Jane Stadium	06:00pm	11	21/12/96 SAT	Brisbane Strikers
2	20/10/96 SUN	Melbourne Knights	v	Gippsland Falcons	Somers Street	06:00pm	11	21/12/96 SAT	South Melbourne
2	20/10/96 SUN	UTS Olympic	v	Canberra Cosmos	Leichhardt Oval	06:30pm	11	21/12/96 SAT	Marconi Fairfield
2	20/10/96 SUN	West Adelaide	v	Perth Glory	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	11	22/12/96 SUN	Adelaide City
2	20/10/96 SUN	Wollongong City	v	Adelaide City	Brandon Park	06:00pm	11	22/12/96 SUN	Melbourne Knights
3	26/10/96 SAT	Brisbane Strikers	v	Wollongong City	Suncorp Stadium	07:00pm	12	28/12/96 SAT	Perth Glory
3	26/10/96 SAT	Canberra Cosmos	v	West Adelaide	Bruce Stadium	07:00pm	12	28/12/96 SAT	Canberra Cosmos
3	26/10/96 SAT	Gippsland Falcons	v	Marconi Fairfield	Falcons Park	07:30pm	12	28/12/96 SAT	Gippsland Falcons
3	26/10/96 SAT	Newcastle Breakers	v	Perth Glory	Breakers Stadium	07:30pm	12	29/12/96 SUN	UTS Olympic
3	27/10/96 SUN	Adelaide City	v	South Melbourne	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	12	29/12/96 SUN	West Adelaide
3	27/10/96 SUN	Collingwood Warriors	v	UTS Olympic	Victoria Park	04:30pm	12	29/12/96 SUN	Collingwood Warriors
3	27/10/96 SUN	Sydney United	v	Melbourne Knights	Sydney Utd Spt Centre	06:30pm	12	29/12/96 SUN	Sydney United
4	01/11/96 FRI	Wollongong City	v	Newcastle Breakers	Brandon Park	07:30pm	13	03/01/97 FRI	Wollongong City
4	02/11/96 SAT	Marconi Fairfield	v	Sydney United	Marconi Stadium	07:00pm	13	04/01/97 SAT	Brisbane Strikers
4	02/11/96 SAT	Perth Glory	v	Canberra Cosmos	Perth Oval	04:00pm	13	04/01/97 SAT	Marconi Fairfield
4	03/11/96 SUN	South Melbourne	v	Brisbane Strikers	Bob Jane Stadium	06:00pm	13	08/01/97 SUN	Adelaide City
4	03/11/96 SUN	Melbourne Knights	v	Adelaide City	Somers Street	06:00pm	13	08/01/97 SUN	South Melbourne
4	03/11/96 SUN	UTS Olympic	v	Gippsland Falcons	Leichhardt Oval	06:30pm	13	08/01/97 SUN	Melbourne Knights
4	03/11/96 SUN	West Adelaide	v	Collingwood Warriors	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	13	08/01/97 SUN	UTS Olympic
5	08/11/96 FRI	Wollongong City	v	South Melbourne	Brandon Park	07:30pm	14	10/01/97 FRI	Newcastle Breakers
5	08/11/96 FRI	Newcastle Breakers	v	Canberra Cosmos	Breakers Stadium	07:30pm	14	11/01/97 SAT	Perth Glory
5	09/11/96 SAT	Brisbane Strikers	v	Melbourne Knights	Suncorp Stadium	07:00pm	14	11/01/97 SAT	Canberra Cosmos
5	09/11/96 SAT	Gippsland Falcons	v	West Adelaide	Falcons Park	07:30pm	14	11/01/97 SAT	Gippsland Falcons
5	10/11/96 SUN	Adelaide City	v	Marconi Fairfield	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	14	12/01/97 SUN	West Adelaide
5	10/11/96 SUN	Collingwood Warriors	v	Perth Glory	Victoria Park	05:30pm	14	12/01/97 SUN	Collingwood Warriors
5	10/11/96 SUN	Sydney United	v	UTS Olympic	Sydney Utd Spt Centre	06:30pm	14	12/01/97 SUN	Sydney United
6	16/11/96 SAT	Marconi Fairfield	v	Brisbane Strikers	Marconi Stadium	07:00pm	15	31/01/97 FRI	Wollongong City
6	16/11/96 SAT	Perth Glory	v	Gippsland Falcons	Perth Oval	04:00pm	15	01/02/97 SAT	Brisbane Strikers
6	16/11/96 SAT	Canberra Cosmos	v	Collingwood Warriors	Bruce Stadium	07:00pm	15	01/02/97 SAT	Marconi Fairfield
6	17/11/96 SUN	South Melbourne	v	Newcastle Breakers	Bob Jane Stadium	06:00pm	15	02/02/97 SUN	South Melbourne
6	17/11/96 SUN	Melbourne Knights	v	Wollongong City	Somers Street	06:00pm	15	02/02/97 SUN	Melbourne Knights
6	17/11/96 SUN	UTS Olympic	v	Adelaide City	Leichhardt Oval	06:30pm	15	02/02/97 SUN	UTS Olympic
6	17/11/96 SUN	West Adelaide	v	Sydney United	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	15	02/02/97 SUN	West Adelaide
7	22/11/96 FRI	Newcastle Breakers	v	Collingwood Warriors	Breakers Stadium	07:30pm	16	07/02/97 FRI	Newcastle Breakers
7	23/11/96 SAT	Brisbane Strikers	v	UTS Olympic	Suncorp Stadium	07:00pm	16	08/02/97 SAT	Canberra Cosmos
7	23/11/96 SAT	Gippsland Falcons	v	Canberra Cosmos	Falcons Park	07:30pm	16	08/02/97 SAT	Gippsland Falcons
7	23/11/96 SAT	Sydney United	v	Perth Glory	Sydney Utd Spt Centre	06:30pm	16	09/02/97 SUN	Perth Glory
7	24/11/96 SUN	Adelaide City	v	West Adelaide	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	16	09/02/97 SUN	Adelaide City
7	24/11/96 SUN	South Melbourne	v	Melbourne Knights	Bob Jane Stadium	06:00pm	16	09/02/97 SUN	Collingwood Warriors
7	24/11/96 SUN	Wollongong City	v	Marconi Fairfield	Brandon Park	06:00pm	16	09/02/97 SUN	Sydney United
8	30/11/96 SAT	Marconi Fairfield	v	South Melbourne	Marconi Stadium	07:00pm	17	14/02/97 FRI	Wollongong City
8	30/11/96 SAT	Canberra Cosmos	v	Sydney United	Bruce Stadium	07:00pm	17	15/03/97 SAT	Marconi Fairfield
8	01/12/96 SUN	Perth Glory	v	Adelaide City	Perth Oval	04:00pm	17	15/03/97 SAT	Perth Glory
8	01/12/96 SUN	Melbourne Knights	v	Newcastle Breakers	Somers Street	06:00pm	17	16/02/97 SUN	South Melbourne
8	01/12/96 SUN	UTS Olympic	v	Wollongong City	Leichhardt Oval	06:30pm	17	16/02/97 SUN	Melbourne Knights
8	01/12/96 SUN	West Adelaide	v	Brisbane Strikers	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	17	16/02/97 SUN	UTS Olympic
8	01/12/96 SUN	Collingwood Warriors	v	Gippsland Falcons	Victoria Park	06:00pm	17	16/02/97 SUN	West Adelaide
9	06/12/96 FRI	Wollongong City	v	West Adelaide	Brandon Park	07:30pm	18	21/02/97 FRI	Newcastle Breakers
9	06/12/96 FRI	Newcastle Breakers	v	Gippsland Falcons	Breakers Stadium	07:30pm	18	22/02/97 SAT	Brisbane Strikers
9	07/12/96 SAT	Brisbane Strikers	v	Perth Glory	Suncorp Stadium	07:00pm	18	22/02/97 SAT	Canberra Cosmos
9	08/12/96 SUN	Adelaide City	v	Canberra Cosmos	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	18	22/02/97 SAT	Gippsland Falcons
9	08/12/96 SUN	South Melbourne	v	UTS Olympic	Bob Jane Stadium	06:00pm			
9	08/12/96 SUN	Melbourne Knights	v	Marconi Fairfield	Somers Street	06:00pm			

HOME	GROUND	KICK OFF	ROUND	DATE	HOME TEAM	VISITORS	GROUND	KICK OFF
Collingwood Warriors	Sydney Utd Spt Centre	06:30pm	18	23/02/97 SUN	Adelaide City	v	Melbourne Knights	Hindmarsh Stadium 07:30pm
Newcastle Breakers	Marconi Stadium	07:00pm	18	23/02/97 SUN	Collingwood Warriors	v	West Adelaide	Victoria Park 06:00pm
Wollongong City	Perth Oval	0 5:00pm	18	23/02/97 SUN	Sydney United	v	Marconi Fairfield	Sydney Utd Spt Centre 06:30pm
Brisbane Strikers	Bruce Stadium	07:00pm	19	28/02/97 FRI	South Melbourne	v	Wollongong City	Bob Jane Stadium 08:00pm
Sydney United	Falcons Park	07:30pm	19	01/03/97 SAT	Marconi Fairfield	v	Adelaide City	Marconi Stadium 07:00pm
Melbourne Knights	Leichhardt Oval	06:30pm	19	01/03/97 SAT	Canberra Cosmos	v	Newcastle Breakers	Bruce Stadium 07:00pm
South Melbourne	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	19	02/03/97 SUN	Perth Glory	v	Collingwood Warriors	Perth Oval 04:00pm
Adelaide City	Victoria Park	06:00pm	19	02/03/97 SUN	Melbourne Knights	v	Brisbane Strikers	Somers Street 06:00pm
Canberra Cosmos	Brandon Park	07:30pm	19	02/03/97 SUN	UTS Olympic	v	Sydney United	Leichhardt Oval 06:30pm
Sydney United	Breakers Stadium	07:30pm	19	02/03/97 SUN	West Adelaide	v	Gippsland Falcons	Hindmarsh Stadium 07:30pm
Collingwood Warriors	Suncorp Stadium	07:00pm	20	07/03/97 FRI	Wollongong City	v	Melbourne Knights	Brandon Park 07:30pm
Perth Glory	Bob Jane Stadium	08:00pm	20	07/03/97 FRI	Newcastle Breakers	v	South Melbourne	Breakers Stadium 07:30pm
UTS Olympic	Marconi Stadium	07:00pm	20	08/03/97 SAT	Brisbane Strikers	v	Marconi Fairfield	Suncorp Stadium 07:00pm
Gippsland Falcons	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	20	08/03/97 SAT	Gippsland Falcons	v	Perth Glory	Falcons Park 07:30pm
Adelaide City	Somers Street	06:00pm	20	09/03/97 SUN	Adelaide City	v	UTS Olympic	Hindmarsh Stadium 07:30pm
Melbourne Knights	Perth Oval	05:00pm	20	09/03/97 SUN	Collingwood Warriors	v	Canberra Cosmos	Victoria Park 06:00pm
South Melbourne	Bruce Stadium	07:00pm	20	09/03/97 SUN	Sydney United	v	West Adelaide	Sydney Utd Spt Centre 06:30pm
Brisbane Strikers	Falcons Park	07:30pm	21	15/03/97 SAT	Marconi Fairfield	v	Wollongong City	Marconi Stadium 07:00pm
Newcastle Breakers	Leichhardt Oval	06:30pm	21	15/03/97 SAT	Perth Glory	v	Sydney United	Perth Oval 04:00pm
Marconi Fairfield	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	21	15/03/97 SAT	Canberra Cosmos	v	Gippsland Falcons	Bruce Stadium 07:00pm
Wollongong City	Victoria Park	06:00pm	21	16/03/97 SUN	Melbourne Knights	v	South Melbourne	Somers Street 06:00pm
Adelaide City	Sydney Utd Spt Centre	06:30pm	21	16/03/97 SUN	UTS Olympic	v	Brisbane Strikers	Leichhardt Oval 06:30pm
Gippsland Falcons	Brandon Park	07:30pm	21	16/03/97 SUN	West Adelaide	v	Adelaide City	Hindmarsh Stadium 07:30pm
Sydney United	Suncorp Stadium	07:00pm	21	16/03/97 SUN	Collingwood Warriors	v	Newcastle Breakers	Victoria Park 06:00pm
Perth Glory	Marconi Stadium	07:00pm	22	21/03/97 FRI	Newcastle Breakers	v	Melbourne Knights	Breakers Stadium 07:30pm
Newcastle Breakers	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	22	22/03/97 SAT	Brisbane Strikers	v	West Adelaide	Suncorp Stadium 700
Collingwood Warriors	Bob Jane Stadium	07:00pm	22	22/03/97 SAT	Gippsland Falcons	v	Collingwood Warriors	Falcons Park 07:30pm
Canberra Cosmos	Somers Street	06:00pm	22	23/03/97 SUN	Adelaide City	v	Perth Glory	Hindmarsh Stadium 07:30pm
Adelaide City	Leichhardt Oval	06:30pm	22	23/03/97 SUN	South Melbourne	v	Marconi Fairfield	Bob Jane Stadium 07:00pm
Adelaide City	Breakers Stadium	07:30pm	22	23/03/97 SUN	Sydney United	v	Canberra Cosmos	Sydney Utd Spt Centre 06:30pm
Marconi Fairfield	Perth Oval	05:00pm	22	23/03/97 SUN	Wollongong City	v	UTS Olympic	Brandon Park 06:00pm
Melbourne Knights	Bruce Stadium	07:00pm	23	29/03/97 SAT	Marconi Fairfield	v	Melbourne Knights	Marconi Stadium 07:00pm
Wollongong City	Falcons Park	07:30pm	23	29/03/97 SAT	Perth Glory	v	Brisbane Strikers	Perth Oval 04:00pm
UTS Olympic	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	23	29/03/97 SAT	Canberra Cosmos	v	Adelaide City	Bruce Stadium 07:00pm
South Melbourne	Victoria Park	06:00pm	23	29/03/97 SAT	Gippsland Falcons	v	Newcastle Breakers	Falcons Park 07:30pm
Brisbane Strikers	Sydney Utd Spt Centre	06:30pm	23	30/03/97 SUN	UTS Olympic	v	South Melbourne	Leichhardt Oval 06:30pm
Sydney United	Brandon Park	07:30pm	23	30/03/97 SUN	West Adelaide	v	Wollongong City	Hindmarsh Stadium 07:30pm
Adelaide City	Suncorp Stadium	07:00pm	23	30/03/97 SUN	Collingwood Warriors	v	Sydney United	Victoria Park 04:30pm
Canberra Cosmos	Marconi Stadium	07:00pm	24	04/04/97 FRI	Newcastle Breakers	v	Marconi Fairfield	Breakers Stadium 07:30pm
Gippsland Falcons	Bob Jane Stadium	07:00pm	24	05/04/97 SAT	Brisbane Strikers	v	Canberra Cosmos	Suncorp Stadium 07:00pm
Collingwood Warriors	Somers Street	06:00pm	24	05/04/97 SAT	Wollongong City	v	Perth Glory	Brandon Park 07:30pm
Perth Glory	Leichhardt Oval	06:30pm	24	06/04/97 SUN	Adelaide City	v	Collingwood Warriors	Hindmarsh Stadium 07:30pm
Newcastle Breakers	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	24	06/04/97 SUN	South Melbourne	v	West Adelaide	Bob Jane Stadium 03:00pm
Brisbane Strikers	Breakers Stadium	07:30pm	24	06/04/97 SUN	Melbourne Knights	v	UTS Olympic	Somers Street 06:00pm
UTS Olympic	Bruce Stadium	07:00pm	24	06/04/97 SUN	Sydney United	v	Gippsland Falcons	Sydney Utd Spt Centre 06:30pm
Melbourne Knights	Falcons Park	07:30pm	25	12/04/97 SAT	Perth Glory	v	South Melbourne	Perth Oval 04:00pm
Adelaide City	Perth Oval	05:00pm	25	12/04/97 SAT	Canberra Cosmos	v	Wollongong City	Bruce Stadium 07:00pm
Wollongong City	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	25	12/04/97 SAT	Gippsland Falcons	v	Adelaide City	Falcons Park 07:30pm
Marconi Fairfield	Victoria Park	06:00pm	25	13/04/97 SUN	UTS Olympic	v	Marconi Fairfield	Leichhardt Oval 06:30pm
South Melbourne	Sydney Utd Spt Centre	06:30pm	25	13/04/97 SUN	West Adelaide	v	Melbourne Knights	Hindmarsh Stadium 07:30pm
Brisbane Strikers	Brandon Park	07:30pm	25	13/04/97 SUN	Collingwood Warriors	v	Brisbane Strikers	Victoria Park 04:30pm
Gippsland Falcons	Marconi Stadium	07:00pm	25	13/04/97 SUN	Sydney United	v	Newcastle Breakers	Sydney Utd Spt Centre 06:30pm
Newcastle Breakers	Perth Oval	05:00pm	26	20/04/97 SUN	Adelaide City	v	Sydney United	Hindmarsh Stadium 06:30pm
Adelaide City	Bob Jane Stadium	07:00pm	26	20/04/97 SUN	Brisbane Strikers	v	Gippsland Falcons	Suncorp Stadium 07:00pm
Sydney United	Somers Street	06:00pm	26	20/04/97 SUN	Wollongong City	v	Collingwood Warriors	Brandon Park 07:00pm
Collingwood Warriors	Leichhardt Oval	06:30pm	26	20/04/97 SUN	South Melbourne	v	Canberra Cosmos	Bob Jane Stadium 07:00pm
Canberra Cosmos	Hindmarsh Stadium	07:30pm	26	20/04/97 SUN	Melbourne Knights	v	Perth Glory	Somers Street 07:00pm
Wollongong City	Breakers Stadium	07:30pm	26	20/04/97 SUN	Marconi Fairfield	v	West Adelaide	Marconi Stadium 07:00pm
South Melbourne	Suncorp Stadium	07:00pm	26	20/04/97 SUN	Newcastle Breakers	v	UTS Olympic	Brisbane Strikers 07:00pm
Perth Glory	Bruce Stadium	07:00pm						
UTS Olympic	Falcons Park	07:30pm						

We recommend that you check your local newspaper on the day of the match for the accuracy of time and place



King

Cantona

He missed France's Euro '96 bid but he's the linchpin of Manchester United's challenge for European glory. Mark Seymour ponders the man and the myth - Eric Cantona.



It was the most famous karate kick in the history of sport. Yet when Eric Cantona aimed a size 10-and-a-half Nike at an irate Crystal Palace fan in January 1995, it not only signalled the beginning of a nine month international ban but also, apparently, an end to Eric's wicked, wicked ways.

For in the year or so since his return to first team action, Cantona has been on his best behaviour. It's no coincidence that the reformed man behind the upturned collar is currently captain of the most successful team in England, and a crucial member of a Manchester United team attempting to end their European Champions League hoodoo.

The Red Devils' triumph in the 1968 European Cup Final, when they became the first English club to win the prized trophy, has been a cross for all subsequent United players to bear. And with manager Alex Ferguson's squad generally thought to be among the best the club has ever assembled, the Old Trafford side's recent failures in Europe have been all the more disappointing.

With their lapses against Galatasaray, Gothenburg and Rotor Volgograd in the last three years fresh in his mind, the rejuvenated Cantona no doubt feels that now is the hour. With the team unfettered by previous UEFA selection restrictions (a rule limiting teams to fielding only three foreigners has just been changed), now is surely the time for United to stand up and be counted.

But Cantona, philosopher that he is, knows that life is full of surprises. The Gallic genius' exclusion from France's Euro '96 squad, for instance, raised many eyebrows in England - possibly even the thick dark brow of the man himself.

French boss Aime Jacquet made the bold, if not entirely vindicated, decision to stick with the squad of relative youngsters who had steered their country through to the finals with a lengthy unbeaten run. These lads, most of whom were barely known outside their local boulangerie before Euro '96, performed well during the early games but failed to deliver as the tournament reached its climax.

Ironically their semi-final against the Czech Republic was played at Old Trafford, and it doesn't take a huge stretch of the imagination to envisage Cantona on his home ground making a vital contribution to the French effort, had he only been selected.

As it was, his inexperienced compatriots proved incapable of providing the killer blow, the game remained scoreless, and one penalty shootout later France were on their way back home across the channel.

United supporters were convinced that Jacquet got it all wrong, remembering Cantona's extraordinary form in the latter part of last season. The goalscoring feast he laid on for his devoted followers was all the more amazing coming hot on the heels of the nine month ban.

After the Selhurst Park fracas of January 1995, it was felt Cantona would never play again. But football remains a game of two halves, and the second 45 minutes has seen a stunning rehabilitation from the man as complex as he is talented.

The 1995/96 season saw United claim the 'double' (the Premier League and FA Cup double) for the second time in three years. Cantona ended up top scorer for the Red Devils, remarkable given that he didn't even play the full season. Add to this the fact that the Frenchman became the first United player to claim the English 'Player of the Year' award since George Best, and you have an individual who can turn a game in a second, his grip on proceedings as strong as his icy gaze of contempt for all those who might doubt him.

The influence he exerts on those around him is extraordinary. Whether he's marshalling the midfield like the Paul Ince of old, or moving up the line of defence to begin another attack, his presence is all-pervasive. And if that's not enough, he'll just go and score himself, as if to say, "well, do I have to do it all on my own?". A proven time and again in the second half of last season, if it needed to, he would.

It would appear that the French reluctance to utilise their finest export since Michel Platini pulled on the stripes of Juve was not unrelated to Cantona's colourful past, and his history with French officialdom certainly made a case for leaving him behind in England (so to speak).

Apart from branding each member of a disciplinary committee an 'idiot' to his face, there has been the odd shirt-throwing incident and unkind character analysis of previous national team coaches. Cantona, for his part, has publicly stated on several occasions that he has no desire to return to France where he feels misunderstood and unappreciated. In fact, the influential French sports daily 'L'Equipe' refers to him as 'the Englishman' - such is the channel-like gulf between two great institutions of French football.

This is not to say that, had he been asked, Cantona would actually have deigned to play. He has his pride, and the snub of not being included in the initial squad, despite the most amazing comeback since Lazarus had his triple-bypass, may well have proved too much for his Gallic sensibility.

The recent responsibility of captaining Manchester United seems also to have brought out the paternal instinct in Cantona, and rather than instigating trouble, he has actually been the one to calm things down when the younger hot-heads around him are losing control. New man Eric, there with a quiet word and a calming hand on the shoulder when tempers are up. Who'd have thought it?

The most important thing to note in all of this is that when the chips are down and a cause looks lost, Cantona is your man, as witnessed by his stunning strike in this year's FA Cup Final. He has often been the difference between winning and losing, glory and defeat - in fact, the difference.

The 30 year old begins his sixth season in England as captain of the Premiership favourites, a team with its best chance yet of winning United's first European Cup trophy in nearly thirty years. The man himself remains as enigmatic as ever.

Scriptwriters planning the story of Eric's rise, fall and subsequent rise would be well advised to steady their pens and wait and see what the King can add to his already remarkable story. ■

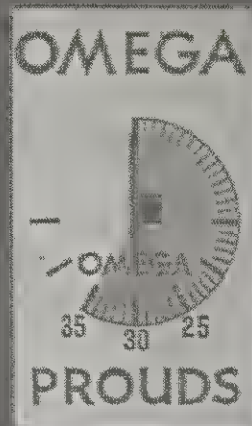
OPTUS OVAL

CARLTON

3

COLLINGWOOD

3



Picture if you will, the following scenario: it is a warm and pleasant Saturday evening in Melbourne. One of the most anticipated domestic soccer matches of the season is nearing its end, but the venue is not Olympic Park or the Lakeside Stadium.

Moments after the referee has blown the final whistle, 10,000 supporters begin to stream out of the gates of Optus Oval after a thrilling match won deservedly by the home side against the visitors from Sydney. Many of the satisfied fans head to their cars, others to the trams running down Royal Parade and Sydney Road with hundreds remaining at the Social Club to share a drink.

Not surprisingly, a large percentage decide to make their way to the mecca of Melbourne's social spots, Lygon Street, less than one kilometre away. They munch on pizzas, pasta and souvlakis, refresh themselves with a beer or enjoy a cooling ice cream. Whichever way they choose to celebrate, the fact remains that they have just seen their side, Carlton Soccer Club, win a great match in the Ericsson Cup.

Many of the happy fans are sporting scarves, jerseys, caps and t-shirts dedicated

to their beloved side which they proudly support, a club with no ethnic ties other than perhaps the most important - this is a club for all people, all races. Carlton is Italian - and Greek, Croatian, British, Argentinian, Spanish, Hungarian, Macedonian and the rest of the Australia's vast ethnic community rolled into one. Like followers of Carlton's AFL club, these fans base their support on entertainment and the famous old dark blue jerseys.

Yet if the Australian Football League has its way, neither Carlton nor Collingwood will have anything to do with soccer in the coming seasons. What we all suspected has now come to the surface - the AFL administration is scared as hell of the threat that soccer poses to Australian Rules.

With this in mind, they seem determined to impose the new Rule 40 preventing any sports other than football and cricket being played in AFL stadiums. However, choosing to fight a legal battle against the likes of Carlton President John Elliott has already done more for soccer than the average marketing guru would have dreamed possible.

All of a sudden soccer has made the headlines for the mere fact that two of

Carlton's bid to enter a soccer club in the 1997-98 Ericsson Cup has excited Australia's soccer fraternity and caught the AFL on the back foot.



Ettore Flacco reports.



BLUES

RARING TO GO



AQUILA
AUSTRALIAN FOOTWEAR

[COMPLETE YOUR LOOK]

Cont. from page 21

Australia's most famous sporting clubs want to be involved with soccer, recognising the appeal of the global sport ... and that is what really hurts the AFL. Even more painful will be the sour taste of defeat should John Elliott lead Carlton in winning the imminent battle.

This obstacle aside, let's look at another scenario: Carlton versus Collingwood in the Ericsson Cup Grand Final - yeah, I'd like to see that! Don't be too surprised if this match-up comes to fruition in the near future, especially if the powers-that-be at Optus Oval have nothing to do with it.

Despite the rumours and constant negative comments emanating from the AFL with regard to AFL clubs like Carlton and Collingwood participating in the round-ball code, Carlton Soccer Club will be a participant in the 1997-98 Ericsson Cup; and the message is clear - Australian soccer will never be the same.

Carlton, which declined an offer to participate in this season's competition on the grounds that it wanted more time to fully prepare itself, has already begun to make an impact on Australian soccer a full 12 months before it kicks a

in anger. Carlton's "Foundation Membership" drive has been met with unexpected high demand, with more than one hundred of the one thousand memberships available already being sold. At \$1,000 a piece, these memberships, when fully sold, will inject \$1 million into Carlton Soccer Club - and if the current trend is any indication, this money will be available before the side plays its first competitive match.

Community and business interest has also steadily grown and, perhaps most of all, the professionalism with which the club has handled every new development has paved the way to a rosy future for the Carlton Soccer Club. More to the point, it has also cast the spotlight onto the existing Ericsson Cup sides - for all the wrong reasons.

Suddenly, pressure is being applied to many of the existing Ericsson Cup clubs, especially the Victorian ones, to lift their game

and pull the proverbial finger out or else face the risk of being overpowered by one of the most powerful sporting clubs in Australia. As a member of the AFL, Carlton has traditionally been one of the strongest clubs, with a record 16 VFL/AFL Premierships confirming the club's high standing as a sporting icon.

Now there is a possibility that Carlton will become a champion of the round-ball code, and although club officials are reluctant to proclaim it, Carlton's participation will be one geared towards the highest levels of professionalism and success yet to be seen in Australian soccer.

Lessons have been learnt about the use of Optus Oval for soccer especially as the memories of the AC Milan / Socceroos encounter at the same venue in 1993 remain, but lessons have been learnt and there is no doubt that the organisation of the pitch will satisfy everyone, from television cameramen to the average fan sitting in the stands.

According to club officials, it is too early to speculate about the question of coaches and players, although it is almost certain that the club will target one or two big name players from overseas. As with every move that Carlton has made so far, announcements will only be made when the time is right and not just for the sake of making the headlines.

The coming weeks will see Carlton's newly established youth team make its debut in the National Youth League, the General Manager and other off-field positions to be filled, while an announcement regarding a major sponsor is only days away. The next 12 months will see many more announcements, press conferences, official launches and most importantly, the signing of players and coaches.

Finally, let's hope that those charged with the responsibility of devising the fixtures at Soccer Australia will schedule a Carlton v Collingwood season opener for the first round of the 1997-98 Ericsson Cup. Just imagine: the two most historic AFL clubs with the fiercest rivalry now meeting in a battle for soccer supremacy. It is a match capable of drawing 25,000 people to Optus Oval. An attendance record broken in its inaugural National League match. I think we'd all like to see that ... except perhaps the AFL. ■



THE

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SOCCER
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poster

A photograph capturing the jubilant moment of Juventus FC's victory in the 1995/96 UEFA Champions League. The team, dressed in their iconic blue and white striped jerseys, is seen celebrating on the pitch. A player in the foreground is being hoisted into the air by a teammate, while others are embracing and shouting in triumph. The background shows a blurred stadium filled with cheering fans. The overall atmosphere is one of intense joy and collective achievement.

JUVENTUS F.C.

UEFA Champions League Winners 1995/96

POWER

Was Euro '96 better than USA '94? What's happening in the FIFA/UEFA/ IOC power struggle? Did Nigeria really beat Brazil and Argentina to win Olympic gold? **Anthony Fensom** grapples with the big issues in world football.

FOR LOVERS of international football, it's been difficult to keep up with the action recently, either on or off the pitch. The Olympic football tournament followed hot on the heels of the 1996 European Championship, all played out in front of the backdrop of an on-going power struggle within FIFA, and between FIFA and the International Olympic Committee.

With the 1996-97 season now underway, an evaluation of Euro '96 and the Atlanta tournament seems appropriate, particularly in view of the current power-plays within FIFA between President Havelange and UEFA's Lennart Johansson, not to mention Olympic President Juan Antonio Samaranch's stouch with FIFA.

Despite the (Australian) media's emphasis on the Olympics, the World Cup remains the world's most prominent sporting event, with 172 nations competing for the 1998 World Cup, and an estimated worldwide television audience for the 1994 final of some two billion viewers. In 1994, FIFA undertook a bold experiment in the hope of bringing football to the attention of the sports-loving American public, in a nation where football refers to men in pads and helmets fighting over an oval-shaped ball.

For FIFA, granting the USA the world's most prestigious sporting event was a gamble on American 'showbiz' capabilities, a prize granted in the hope of engineering a successful American national league. A review of the statistics indicates that USA '94 was the most successful World Cup staged in the history of football.

Crowd attendances averaged 68 thousand, twenty thousand more than the average at Italia '90 (undoubtedly helped by larger

stadia in the USA), the total attendance was over three and a half million, 140 goals were scored at an average of 2.7 per match, and despite a lacklustre final which ended in a penalty shoot-out between Italy and Brazil, the quality of the matches was generally of a high standard. Brazil, Nigeria, Romania and the United States were particularly impressive, with Italy and Germany supplying their usual brand of polished football.

While the American national league (Major League Soccer or MLS) did not get off the ground until 1996, MLS has succeeded in attracting a range of quality footballers to America (Roberto Donadoni, formerly of AC Milan for example), in addition to enticing larger than expected crowds (40 or 50 thousand reported in New York, with an average of around 10,000). After the success of USA '94, President Havelange could look forward to the 1996 European championships in England and view how his UEFA rival Johansson handled 'his' event.

For Lennart Johansson, the staging of the tenth European nations championship in England was a test of his leadership and ability to prevent the troublesome so-called 'English disease' of hooliganism interfering with the beautiful game. Drawn at random in the fixtures was a match which had not been played for a number of years: England and Scotland at Wembley. A massive

GAMES



security crackdown was enforced to prevent the organised hooligans of England, Scotland, Holland and other countries upstaging the action on the pitch.

Despite the tension however, only the English media displayed any vitriol towards their foreign rivals, with a 'D-Day' style 'Battle of Britain' write-up of the decisive semi-final match between England and Germany at Wembley. Tongue-in-cheek perhaps, but the articles sparked political recriminations between the former enemies and led to the German team placing full-advertisements in British media thanking people of Britain for their hospitality in staging the event.

The football itself was as expected: a technical, stylish display from the continental sides such as Italy, Portugal and France, a more aggressive approach from the English and Scottish teams. The flair of the South American and African sides that was so attractive at USA '94 was sorely missed: fans of attractive football: such entertainment came only in patches, in



Germany's Kerber gets stuck into Patrik Berger of the Czech Republic during the Euro '96 Final

Put simply, Havelange's rotation plan involves rotating the World Cup finals around the confederations of Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and North and Central America. Oceania's awarding of full confederation status (despite Australia's urging for FIFA to delay their decision) however will not guarantee the finals coming to Australia every 24 years.

For the money-men of UEFA, such a plan is simply another example of Havelange's increasing senility and refusal to bow to football's paymaster. For the underdeveloped nations of Africa and elsewhere however, Havelange's idea is viewed as a fair distribution of FIFA's riches. Havelange, though, has managed to

preserve the World Cup as the premier football tournament, FIFA has resisted Samaranch's pleas for national teams to participate, instead maintaining the Olympic tournament as an under 23 years event, although with the recent caveat of each country being allowed three over-age players.

Despite the hoopla at the Olympics concerning the athletics and swimming events (so beloved of Australian media commentators), football retained its position as the most popular event at the Games, drawing 40% of all attendees, a good deal more than any other individual sport. FIFA is thus in a strong bargaining position with the International Olympic Committee, as who needs the other more?

Reviewing the Olympic football tournament (or what was shown on Australian television) was like a trip down memory lane to USA '94. Large crowds, attractive football, entertaining victory dances, and a great many goals scored. Down 3-1 against Brazil in the semi-final and seemingly on their way back home, somehow the Nigerian team managed to turn it all around, and courtesy of Nwankwo Kanu's golden goal, celebrated an improbable 4-3 victory. Brazil yet again had failed to win the elusive football gold medal, despite assembling a team with talent such as Bebeto, Juninho, Roberto Carlos and Ronaldinho (Romario was not included).

The final itself between Nigeria and Argentina, was a battle between the vibrant

games such as between Croatia and Denmark and England and Holland.

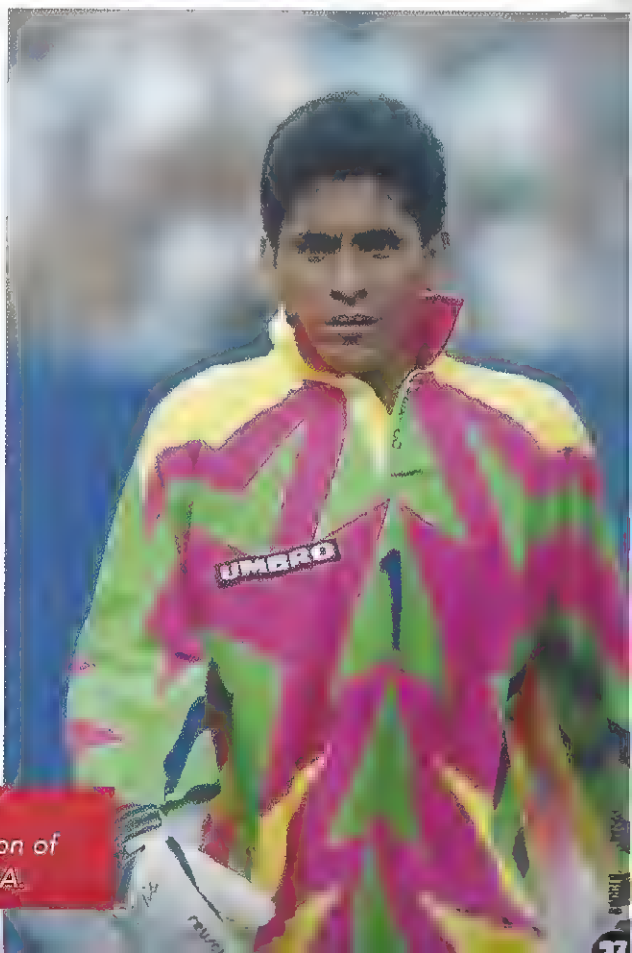
Consequently the goal average dropped to only 2.06 per game (USA '94 2.7), with four matches decided via the lottery of the penalty shoot-out. FIFA's new 'golden goal' rule came into account only in the final itself, when Oliver Bierhoff capitalised on a generous linesman to curve the ball past Czech keeper Petr Kouba for the winner, Germany victorious 2-1 over the valiant underdogs.

In the end, Germany's stamina, nerve, and depth of its squad (there was talk of the German goalkeeper playing in the outfield in the final due to injuries) triumphed, succeeding in winning their third championship, with the favourites Holland and Italy unable to perform to their potential.

The overall success of the event led to Prime Minister John Major's invitation for FIFA to bring the World Cup 'back home' also. However, Havelange's proposal to rotate the Cup could see Europe waiting until 2018 for such an occasion.

remain in power for so long by constantly changing his position and buying his supporters: the new Confederations Cup, to be staged in Saudi Arabia in December 1997, being a prime example, with each confederation guaranteed \$1 million for their participation. Havelange also managed to placate his rivals by expanding the 1998 World Cup finals to 32 countries. Such efforts indicate that Havelange will remain President for quite a while longer.

Speaking of Presidents, a certain Juan Antonio Samaranch, buoyed by the success of the Atlanta Coca-Cola/IBM etc Olympics, was recently quoted complaining about FIFA's refusal to allow full-strength teams in the Olympic football tournament. In an endeavour to



Mexico's fluorescent goalkeeper, Jorge Campos, has joined the legion of foreign stars playing MLS in the USA

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attacking flair of Nigeria and the technical excellence of the South Americans. A dive worthy of Serie A earned the Argentinians a penalty in the 50th minute, after a powerful header from Nigeria's Babayaro cancelled out Lopez's second minute strike.

However once Amokachi equalised in the 74th minute, the Nigerians reasserted their supremacy, and in the final minute of normal time were given the benefit of the doubt by the linesman for the winning goal, a dubious goal perhaps, but equalising the earlier penalty decision.

A marvellous finish to an entertaining tournament, despite the failure of Australia's Olympic team to progress past the first round, despite having (on paper) the best squad yet assembled, with seemingly sound preparation. Australia began their campaign with a 2-0 loss to France, with Daniel Tiatto yet again given his marching orders by the referee.

The Olyroos recovered their confidence with a 2-1 victory over Saudi Arabia, a match featuring a penalty save by Frank Juric and a goal of international class by Mark Viduka. The Australians then played their final match against Spain, knowing that only a victory would secure progression to the quarter finals.

After a dream start (2-0 after fifteen minutes), the Olyroos made the mistake of attempting to close down the game. The Spanish however would not be denied, and after Real Madrid's Raul converted a free kick just outside the box,

Mark Viduka scored a memorable goal for the Olyroos against Saudi Arabia, but it wasn't enough.

The Spanish pressured the Australian goalkeeper until the equaliser.

At 2-2 the Olyroo campaign was over, and in surging forward for the winner the Australians left their backline dangerously exposed, the Spanish capitalising by converting a three-against-one

opportunity to win outright, 3-2. Once again, Australia had failed to match expectation with results: yet hopefully, valuable lessons will have been learnt about the need to continue attacking, regardless of the scoreline.

The Olympic football tournament also featured a women's section, and in this category the attendance for the final match between the USA and the People's Republic of China (approximately 77,000) was a record for any women's sporting event in history! Further evidence, if any was required, that football remains the world's most popular sport.

With the end of the Olympics, the football world returned to its regular program, with the beginning of the new 1996/97 season in the major leagues of England, Scotland, France, Belgium and Holland a mere fortnight after the closing ceremony.

The countdown to France '98 has now begun, yet with the growing popularity of the football leagues in England, Italy and Spain, helped by large injections of capital from television networks (\$1.34 billion in England over five years, \$140 million per annum in Italy, \$2 billion in Spain over seven

years), the problem for FIFA is the

interest in national matches. Striking the right balance will be Havelange's most difficult task, should he seek to hold off the UEFA challenge. ■



Action from USA '94 with Nigeria's Rashidi Yekini. Two years later the Nigerian claimed the Olympic football gold medal.



It looks painful, but Enrico Chiesa has just scored his only goal for Italy in Euro '96.

increasing congestion on the football calendar and diminishing

ALOISI'S ITALIAN DREAM

Late last year John Aloisi became the first Australian to score a goal in the most prestigious league in the world. Frank Pangallo reports on the South Australian sensation better known in Italy than on his home soil.

For a moment just imagine this. A team from Italy's fabulously glam Serie A plucks you from football obscurity. A week later the manager gambles his already shaky reputation and hands you — a scrawny Aussie kid — a first-team shirt! With your first touch of the ball you send the win-starved home fans delirious with a goal after less than two minutes. And, at the end of a morale-busting 10-game losing streak, you're hailed a local hero!

It all sounds like some incredible dream many young footballers around the world, let alone Australia, can only fantasise about.

But that's just the way it happened for twenty-year-old John Aloisi, an Adelaide boy who left his close-knit family at the tender age of 16 to make his mark on the international football stage.

Some story, eh... and we've barely passed the first chapter!

When John Aloisi made his debut for Cremonese against Padova last year, he became only the second Aussie after Frank Farina to make it into the biggest league of them all.

Unlike Frankie, though, John not only lasted the season but the club bought him outright for \$1.5 million and signed him for a further three seasons, although this year the relegated Cremonese will be doing it in Serie B.

Not that it matters to the "Kangaroo of the Nord". He couldn't be happier with the course his career has taken.

"I still have to pinch myself to see if it's all really happening," the swarthy good-looking younger brother of Olyroo and West Adelaide midfielder Ross laughs.

Chapter Two in the extraordinary life and times of John Aloisi unfolded in Adelaide

just a few weeks into the off-season. He came home to marry his childhood sweetheart and sweep her off her feet to the northern Italian home of Cremona.

"He might be just 20 but he thinks, talks and acts like a very mature 28-year-old," offers groomsman and soccer expatriate Aurelio Vidmar.

And you'd better believe it. For Aloisi is a confident, well-mannered and athletic young man full of purpose and conviction about his professional role.

"There are no regrets of course...but I'll admit that a few times early on there were,"

It's a question that will have to be addressed quickly by soccer's hierarchy otherwise he could well be lost to the Azzurri.

John explains. "But I've always said to myself once you make a decision stick to it. I fought it out and it's worked out so far for me."

Yet Aloisi remains one of Australian soccer's most intriguing characters. The question on the lips of the cognoscenti is an emphatic: why isn't John playing for one of the national teams?

It's a question that will have to be addressed quickly by soccer's hierarchy otherwise he could well be lost to the Azzurri in much the same way as Christian Vieri, the richly-gifted son of ex-Marconi import Roberto Vieri.

Surprisingly, few people have asked why John wasn't in our last national youth team

or why he didn't partner his equally-talented brother in the Olyroos in Atlanta. After all he did play constantly in the toughest league of all last season and was the only Australian to do so. What's more, he's scored a clutch of goals up against the most uncompromising of defenders and mixed it with high-calibre names like Batistuta, Weah, Boban, etc.

Eddie Thomson says it's all got to do with a letter in which John Aloisi tells FIFA General Secretary, Sepp Blatter, that he wants to play for the Italians, not Australia. Shades of Craig Johnston or Paul Okon, it seems.

But John Aloisi paints a different picture. He's adamant he wants to play for Australia, even though he's eligible for Italy too because of his dual nationality status through his father, South Australian state league coach Rocky Aloisi.

"We haven't picked him because he's told us he didn't want to play for us," argues Thommo. "It's as simple as that."

Since that letter, no one from Soccer Australia has even bothered to contact Aloisi to talk about it in more detail. Or persuade him otherwise.

Aloisi says it all goes back to 1993 when he was in camp in Holland with Les Scheinflug's youth squad. Les wanted him to fly with the rest of the squad for the Oceania qualifiers. The timing couldn't have been worse for Aloisi, who was trying hard not only to overcome his homesickness, but also to break into Europe.

"I asked Les to release me because we had a very strong team even without me," he recalls.

"Les seemed understanding. He said 'yeah, yeah' and promised to talk to the ASF about it.

"The next thing I get a letter from them

threatening to suspend me unless I returned. I thought it would have been a waste of time against weak opposition and especially when I am trying to make a living as a professional. I know it would have been damaging to my chances of staying with the club if I went back.

"I told FIFA I had dual citizenship and would choose to represent Italy if they carried out the threat to suspend me. That's why I wrote the letter – so I wouldn't get suspended.

"I'd love to play for Australia but I was going to Italy as an Italian player, not as a foreigner. They're tough decisions but you have to consider what's best for you, and at that time club football was paying my bills.

"I am not worried, though. I am happy to be where I am. I've got plenty of time and I don't bear any grudges against Les or Eddie.

Aloisi points out Paul Okon was in a similar predicament two years ago while trying to break into Club Brugge. Okon has since been "forgiven" and will undoubtedly be Thommo's key World Cup defender.

Aloisi – a class act even as a junior, first with Ingle Farm, then Adelaide City – hasn't looked back since his decision to leave the Zebras four years ago on the advice of teammate Nehmana Obradovic.

"(Coach) Zoran Matic told me to be patient, but I spent a lot of games on the bench. After a while I realised I couldn't force my way into the first team, so I thought I'd give it a shot overseas," recalls Aloisi.

He trialled first with Standard Liege in 1993 and then Antwerp.

"I must admit the first year was hard," he remembers. "A lot of the time I thought of picking up and coming home."

Injuries curtailed his appearances to 15 games in 1994 but he hit a purple patch near the end of the season, attracting the interest of Serie A battlers Cremonese.

"The manager Angie Simeone liked the way I played and I'll never forget that opening match or scoring that goal. It's great

"When your team is losing you don't want to be seen in public because the fans will attack you! It's not too bad in Cremona, though.

"The competition itself is awesome... there are defenders who are strong and can play with the ball. Attackers who do amazing things on and off the ball."

Aloisi doesn't take long to nominate the best side he came up against.

"AC Milan. With Baresi, Costacurta and Maldini they're very well organised. We drew 0-0 in Cremona and everyone was happy," he smiles.

As for the players who have impressed him the most, again an immediate response.

"Chiesa! he yells. "What a player... watch out for him. He's on the way to super stardom.

"Arrigo Sacchi didn't give him much of a go in the Euro Championships but you saw what he could do when he came on.

"He came from nowhere. A Sampdoria discard who made his mark with 14 goals at Cremonese in 1994 then moving Parma where he bagged 20. He's got great goal sense.

"George Weah is a brilliant play-maker and opportunist who holds up the ball beautifully. And Batistuta... ah!" he motions with his hands. "Prolific and brilliant, what can you say."

Aloisi says his own game has improved remarkably. It had to if he was to survive in the cut-throat atmosphere.

"I'm a lot faster and sharper. You have to think quicker and pray you don't lose the ball at the half-way line or the opposition will steam roll you.

"It's all about pressure and timing. I'm still learning, believe me!"

In Italy a footballer's lot – especially in Serie A – is far from being a poor one. John Aloisi is earning twenty times what he would have been earning had he not gone overseas.

complete player than himself and unlucky not to still be playing in Europe.

"He's such an intelligent player," extorts John. "I rate him a better soccer brain than me. I could never play in his position... and I still learn a lot from him."

If there's one thing John Aloisi cannot overcome it's homesickness. He's adamant he'll finish his playing days in the bianco nero of his home team, Adelaide City.

But Zebra fans, be prepared for a long wait! ■



John Aloisi (left) with brother, best man Ross Aloisi (left) and groomsmen Aurelio Vidmar (right) at his recent wedding.

"I don't waste it," he laughs. "My Dad has taught me well in that regard. I live well but I've also got to plan for my future."

His new bride will help cure his loneliness but he still misses his older brother, Ross, a gifted player in his own right.

Little brother pays him a huge compliment and considers him a far more

"It's great for your confidence when you're in that sort of competition"

your confidence when you're in that sort of competition," says Aloisi.

Aloisi had spells off the bench for the latter part of the season while Cremonese promoted Tempioni as its main striker in order to get an end-of-season sale for the player. Now John Aloisi will be primo materi for the club in Serie B and he's looking forward to the challenge.

"Serie A is everything they say it is and more," Aloisi gasps. "There's pressure from the press and the supporters, let alone from members of your own squad.

BEATING THE DRUM FOR FOOTBALL

Damien Lovelock is one of rock and roll's great performers, and one of soccer's great advocates, as Patrick Mangan discovered.

Damien Lovelock's band, the Celibate Rifles, was once described by American 'Rolling Stone' magazine as 'the best rock band in the world, bar none'. Yet 11 albums into their career, the Rifles remain one of rock music's best-kept secrets - adored by thousands of fans worldwide, but rarely threatening to score the hit single that would make them household names.

Lovelock draws a firm parallel between the underground success of his band and the understated progress of another of his loves, the beautiful game of soccer. "We are to the Australian music industry what soccer is to football in Australia. We are the 'other' code, we're the code you'll never hear on commercial radio."

Despite this, the Celibate Rifles draw large crowds wherever they play, both in Australia and the rest of the world, and Lovelock himself, in any case, has little time to dwell on the elusive and fleeting nature of rock and roll fame.

For Lovelock is a man of many talents, and when he's not treading the boards on tour with his band, he's playing gigs on his own or putting pen to paper and writing the odd book. In 1995, his first effort, 'What's For Dinner, Dad?' (a single father's guide to cooking) was published. His follow-up release has taken him in a slightly different direction. It's called 'Soccer - Great Moments, Great Players in

World Football'.

"The 'True Stories' book series is aimed at 13 year olds," he explains, "and it's trying to give an incentive to kids to read, a book they can handle. And I thought a book on soccer would be good - not aimed at the really knowledgeable theorists, but which has all the information in there in a short, digestible manner."

"I pitched it at the book people and they asked 'Why?'. I said, 'Soccer's the most played sport in the world, you know. So let's do it'. Soccer is one of the abiding passions of my

confuses people - the gap between not having ever played the game, and watching a cup final. You're looking at people running around but you don't understand why they're running around. That's the problem."

Most importantly, Lovelock's book has received the seal of approval from his toughest critic - his 13 year old son, Luke. "He said, 'You know, Dad, the 'Swiss Bolt' (a team formation utilised by Uruguay in the 1950s, which Lovelock explains in his book) would suit our team'. So they used a version of the 'Swiss Bolt' the next week and beat this team

who hadn't been beaten, and they went on and won the Grand Final - that was kinda cool." Although a soccer "book might not seem like a logical follow-

"I wanted to communicate the passion I have for the game, because I remembered what it was like for me when I fell in love with soccer."

life, along with music, rugby, surfing, I've always loved it.

"I wanted to communicate the passion I have for the game, because I remembered what it was like for me when I fell in love with soccer. And I thought that there must be potentially thousands of people out there like me."

"Casual observers of the game, say, people who only watch the finals, they can read the section on tactics and then when they see the game they've actually got some idea of what they're looking at. Because that's what

up to 'What's For Dinner, Dad?', it's a natural progression for Lovelock as he'd already made a name for himself as ABC youth network Triple-J's major events soccer reporter. His first gig was the 1993 World Youth Championships where he skilfully (although somewhat enigmatically) established an indirect link between football and the Tibetan 'Book of the Dead'.

"I was literally reading whole passages of the Tibetan 'Book of the Dead' and substituting certain words," he recalls. "I remember we had the 'Scheinflug Illuminations' and the

'Agostino Principle'.

"People started ringing up the station and saying 'I've never watched soccer in my life, but I listened to those reports and then watched the games and I knew what you were talking about'". He laughs at the thought. "That's the scary bit."

Lovelock's style struck a major chord with Triple-J listeners and the network called on his services again for the 1994 World Cup. "This time I did it in a more understandable fashion. I had things like 'The All-Singing, All-Dancing, Hristo Stoichkov Follies', and people really got into it."

"They did a talkback the morning of the final. We did an hour and ten minutes of talkback radio about soccer - this was national radio - and they could have gone another six hours. It was incredible the response that came out, and this was, like, Fred Nurk from Oodnadatta."

"This one guy rang up and he said 'I like soccer because it's 'Swan Lake' with goals', which I think is the greatest explanation of the game I've ever heard. It just killed me."

The fair-haired singer's passion for soccer is obvious, but it's a far cry from his days as a youngster, when rugby was the only sport that counted. "From the age of about ten I used to play for three teams every weekend and train five days a week. I was in a boarding school and the rest of my life at that time was horrible, and that's the only thing that made it bearable."

"While I was at boarding school I never actually met a soccer player. I had a grandpa who'd played for Arsenal and that was just a source of shame for me. But at 14, you suddenly start playing guys in rugby who are fully grown. It didn't matter how fast you were they'd catch you, and I felt it was extremely unfair - I couldn't explain why - to be beaten by people who weren't as good at this sport as I was, they were just bigger and faster."

"I was knocked out three times in five games and that's serious. I know a lot of people think that's what rugby's like, but most players wouldn't get knocked out twice in their career. When I woke up the third time in hospital, my mum said 'If you want to play rugby again you can move out, because you're going to get brain damage and I'm not bringing you up for that'."

"I'd just moved to Vaucluse Boys High and the Jewish kids in my French class said 'come along'. They said 'You play goalie because you can catch' and I was kind of depressed and kind of ashamed, thinking 'What am I going to do with my life?'."

"I remember standing between the sticks and watching this stupid game unfold, and suddenly I began to get into it. By half-time I was absolutely mesmerised - mesmerised isn't even the word. You'd be standing there and you'd see a lane of opportunity open up - you'd

be watching one of your players running, and you'd 'see' the pass. I was entranced, it was like a magic spell."

Lovelock believes that if you can communicate the passion you have, you'll always succeed. To see passion in action, just ask the singer/writer/radio reporter about the current state of soccer in Australia. And then stand back.

"If you've got a big enough chequebook, anything can happen," he says emphatically. "Cable (pay-TV) is such a voracious consumer of sport that it'll put anything on. If you and I were to start a Cockroach Racing League, we'd be able to sell it to cable tomorrow. If that happens with soccer, suddenly soccer goes 'kaboom' and explodes all over the screen."

"When UTS Olympic is on Channel Nine every second week and they're on the back page of the newspaper four times a week, not eight pages in from the back, then everyone will follow them because they'll become larger than life. The problem is that AFL players, rugby league players and rugby union players are larger than life, while soccer players are the same size as you and me."

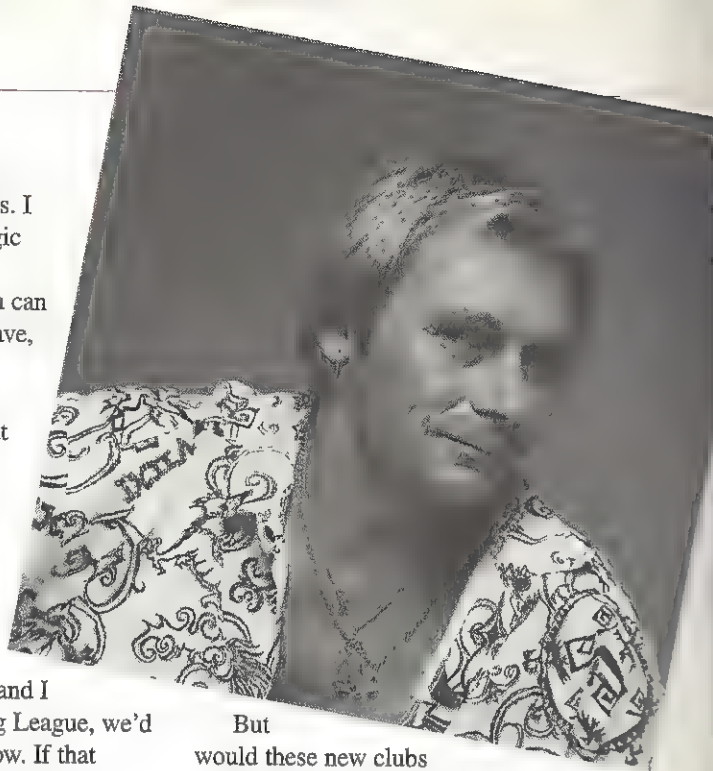
"I don't want to see soccer as the dominant sport, I think it's great that Australia has three, four, five codes, because it makes us different to the rest of the world, and I don't want to lose that difference. But there's no reason why you have to have three codes at one level and soccer as the poor cousin."

Any questions about soccer's long-term future in this country will inevitably lead to discussion of the 'ethnic' issue and how it affects the national league. It's an emotive topic and Lovelock's views are typically strident.

"I don't want to go to a game and feel alienated because I'm not giving the salute and running around like some trumped-up little fascist, and I'll be absolutely point blank about that."

"I played for Hakoah juniors (a Jewish-backed club) as an Irish Catholic and didn't have so much of a problem. I played for an English club and you didn't have to be a skinhead. I played for an Irish club once and you didn't have to be an IRA supporter. For some people it's such an issue and that's the problem in itself."

"Some of the clubs obviously have an ethnic fan base, but without a paramilitary approach to spectator sport, while other ones seem to be very strongly tied to that. I think the answer is you either discourage that or let's have the Manly-Warringah rugby league team soccer boys playing or Carlton United or whoever, because that will most definitely get rid of it."



But would these new clubs be able to attract large numbers of supporters? "If you say it loud enough and long enough - absolutely. Eastern Suburbs rugby league team have just linked with the Sydney Swans, so if you own a Swans badge, you can go to any Easts game for nothing. They're not trying to convert you from one to the other, they want you to like both. And in a country that's got 17 million and not 170 million, that is the way to go."

Lovelock doesn't feel that soccer's got too much to learn from Australia's boom sport of the '90s, basketball. "I think there'll be a reaction against basketball because it's America, and people out here don't want to be Americanised ultimately. I hate basketball now - my son loves it - because of the baseball caps and the baggy clothes and the 'Michael Jordan is God'. It'll die - I remember when roller derby was everything, I remember ninja turtles." He smiles. "They went."

Lovelock seems comfortable wearing his array of hats as rock singer, author, on-air radio reporter and single father. Occasionally the hats blend well together, as when Luke adapted the 'Swiss bolt' from his father's book, and in fact it's Luke who can take the credit for Lovelock's current multi-faceted lifestyle. "My son needed braces," he explains, "and they're expensive. The cost of his braces made me invent all these new careers."

Not that he's complaining. "The chance to talk enthusiastically about something that you love is such a rare opportunity in life." He pauses, looking over at the rugby league game on the television opposite, then back to the task at hand. "You'd be a fool not to take it." ■

Damien Lovelock's book, "Soccer: Great Players, Great Moments in World Football", is available now, published by Allen & Unwin as part of their 'True Stories' series. Recommended retail price is \$9.95

THE ROAD

I Italy and England are among soccer's greatest and oldest rivals. Their clashes over the years at a club and national level have become part of the game's folklore. This fierce sporting rivalry – which hasn't always been very sporting – enters a new phase when the two countries face each other in the qualifying rounds of the 1998 World Cup.

And for the first time in many years England are tipped to turn the tables on the Italians.

The first match takes place at Wembley in February and the second in Italy in November.

These two giants of the world game are expected to dominate European qualifying Group Two that includes Poland, Georgia and Moldova.

The winners of Europe's nine groups plus the best-placed runners-up go straight into the finals in France while the other eight "losers" will play off for the other four spots. England have gone into their qualifying campaign with guns blazing, backed by the reassurance that they are now back among the elite of the world game. This was one of the key aspects to emerge from the 1996 European Championships in June.

Under the motivational guidance of **Terry Venables**, England came within a whisker of reaching their first ever Euro final after a commendable performance culminating in that epic semi-final with Germany at Wembley, which was undoubtedly the match of the tournament.

Although England failed to get past their bogey team – they haven't beaten Germany in a competitive match since the 1966 World Cup final – their long-suffering fans had every reason to feel proud of the national team once again. And England's revamped spirit and attitude were no more conspicuous than in their 4-1 thrashing of Holland in an unforgettable night at Wembley.

The Italians, masters of patient and diligent football, will not have fond memories of their English adventure. After playing quite marvellously for 45 minutes against Russia, the normally disciplined Azzurri lost their way.

The World Cup qualifiers are in full swing all over the world and the battle for a place in France '98 doesn't get more intense than in European Group Two, where former world champions Italy and England clash head-on.

Philip Micallef reports.

They grossly underestimated the Czech Republic by resting five regular players, and then lost the game 2-1.

In their third game they failed to get the goal against Germany that would have given them a spot in the quarter-finals.

So, much to the disappointment of the organisers, crowd-pulling Italy got an early plane home.

The problem with Italy is that coach **Arrigo Sacchi** has gradually turned the side from one of artists into one of artisans.

His choice of players confirms this. The current crop of Italian internationals would have to be the best prepared physically and mentally in decades, but while grafters and battlers will lose few matches they won't win many either. And for a country like Italy, this is just not good enough.

There was a distinct lack of class and finesse in Italy's side. Only the immaculate Paolo Maldini in defence stood out as a world class player in a side that ran its heart out, but achieved very little.

Maldini is so polished a player that he seems out of place among the ordinary collection of Di Matteos, Fusers, Contes and Carbonis.

Italian football might well be in for a lean period at national team level.

England quickly applied the pressure on the Italians by winning their first qualifying match in Moldova by three clear goals.

Given that the Italians do not normally score many goals away from home, it would seem that Glenn Hoddle's men have already taken the psychological upper hand.

In winning their third European title, Germany underlined their status as the world's leading soccer country since World War II.

Few more things could have gone wrong for Berti Vogts' side in England but they amazingly still emerged victorious quite deservedly.

After losing key defender Jurgen Kohl the first few minutes of their debut game against the Czechs, they rearranged their defence and went on to win 2-0 thanks to a superlative display from tearaway fullback Christian Ziege, German football's new boy.

The Germans had to dig deep into the considerable resources of inner-strength to knock out Italy, especially as they played the second half with 10 men after the expulsion of Thomas Strunz.

In the quarter-final against strangely violent Croatia they kept their nerve to win 2-1, thanks to the sublime attacking skills of much-improved sweeper Matthias Sammer who made the first goal and scored the winner himself.

Germany took the field in the semi-final against England without key striker Jurgen Klinsmann who was injured and, to make matters worse, they fell behind after only two minutes.

But they clawed their way back into the game, scored an equaliser and went on to win on penalties.

Germany had two men suspended for the final against the Czechs, including the influential Andy Moller.

But they once again recovered from a goal down – through a penalty awarded for a foul by Sammer on Karel Poborsky, which television replays showed was committed outside the area – to snare a 2-1 "golden goal" victory.

Many thought the Germans were somewhat fortunate to win the tournament, but only fools would not recognise the



FRANCE

ermans' durability, efficiency, self-belief and ability to peak at major tournaments.

Once again, Germany's quest for the World Cup will be spearheaded by that incomparable striker Jurgen Klinsmann.

The Bayern bomber – a thoroughly experienced player now after playing in Germany, Italy, France and England – was not his best at Euro '96, but this did not stop him from scoring a superb goal against Russia with a sweetly struck curling shot.

Klinsmann will have to be watched closely in Group Nine rivals Portugal, Northern Ireland and Ukraine if they are to make any progress in the competition.

The real success story at Euro '96, however, was the Czech Republic.

Although they had beaten Holland and Norway in the

Euro '96 qualifiers, few gave them any chance in the

finals.

But the cheeky Czechs bounced the Italians, Russians, Portuguese and French before meeting their Waterloo at Wembley in the final.

But they left many happy memories, especially that sensational "sand wedge" shot from Poborsky that beat Portugal 1-0 in the quarter-finals at Villa Park.

Patrik Berger was another Czech hero, and after a slow start he came into his own and played a blinder in the final, even putting his side ahead with a penalty. Poborsky's and Berger's achievements in England did not go unnoticed and the two stars earned rich contracts with English Premier League giants Manchester United and Liverpool in the off-season.

The Czechs have a hard job on their hands in the World Cup qualifying. They are in Group Two with Spain, Yugoslavia and their "cousins" Slovakia.

Elsewhere in Europe, Croatia should fight it out with Denmark for the honours in Group

One, Switzerland and Norway look like the teams to beat in Group Three, Scotland, Sweden and Austria are

engaged in a sheer dogfight in Group Four, Russia and Bulgaria should have few problems in Group Five, Holland and Belgium should see off Wales in Group Seven and Rumania are expected to be too strong for Ireland in Group Eight.

For the first time the South American qualifying section will be decided by a sole round-robin group on a home-and-away basis.

This way all South American sides are guaranteed eight home games, which is great news for cash-strapped countries like Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador.

But for Argentina, Uruguay and Colombia, who have scores of players plying their trade abroad, securing all their stars for every game will be a nightmare.

Anyhow, Colombia have set the pace in the race for France and are leading the section comfortably.

Faustino Asprilla, the temperamental striker who was blamed in some quarters for Newcastle's failure to win last season's English Premier League, is playing as well as ever for his country.

In Colombia's fourth match against Chile in Baranquilla, Asprilla scored a glorious hat-trick to help his side to a comfortable 4-1 victory.

Former champions Argentina and Uruguay are not doing so well. Argentina have yet to get their act together after four games and are lying in mid-table.

Thankfully ace striker Gabriel Batistuta has not lost his touch and his consistent goalscoring feats should give Argentina a berth in the 32-team finals.

Batistuta is quite an amazing player, really. He does not look very good on the ball but when it comes to putting the ball in the net he has few, if any, equals. He has scored some absolutely sensational goals for club and country in his career and the way he has started this season would indicate we have not seen the best of him yet.

Copa America holders Uruguay are in serious danger of not qualifying at all after a very ordinary start which saw them lose two of their three matches.

The Light Blues must start winning a few more games pretty soon or else it is adios for France. ■

EUROPE

(14 teams to qualify plus hosts France)

GROUP 1: Denmark, Greece, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia

GROUP 2: Italy, England, Poland, Georgia, Moldova

GROUP 3: Norway, Switzerland, Finland, Hungary, Azerbaijan

GROUP 4: Sweden, Scotland, Austria, Latvia, Belarus, Estonia

GROUP 5: Russia, Bulgaria, Israel, Cyprus, Luxembourg

GROUP 6: Spain, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Yugoslavia, Malta, Faroe Islands

GROUP 7: Holland, Belgium, Turkey, Wales, San Marino

GROUP 8: Romania, Ireland, Lithuania, Iceland, Macedonia, Liechtenstein

GROUP 9: Germany, Portugal, Northern Ireland, Ukraine, Albania, Armenia

Nine group winners and best runners-up qualify automatically. Eight other runners-up will be drawn into pairs and will play off. The winners will qualify.

SOUTH AMERICA

(4 to qualify plus holders Brazil)

Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela will play a round-robin series with the first four qualifying.

CONCACAF

(3 to qualify)

SEMI-FINALS

GROUP 1: USA, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Team D

GROUP 2: Canada, El Salvador, Team A, Belize

GROUP 3: Mexico, Honduras, Team B, Team C

Top two in each group go into final phase (league system) with the top three to qualify.

AFRICA

(5 to qualify)

SECOND ROUND

GROUP 1: Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Kenya

GROUP 2: Liberia, Tunisia, Egypt, Namibia

GROUP 3: Congo, Zambia, South Africa, Zaïre

GROUP 4: Angola, Zimbabwe, Togo, Cameroon

GROUP 5: Gabon, Ghana, Morocco, Burundi

Group winners to qualify

ASIA

(3 to qualify and fourth team to play off with Oceania winners)

GROUP 1: Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Taiwan

GROUP 2: Iran, Syria, Maldives Islands, Kirghizistan

GROUP 3: United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Jordan

GROUP 4: Japan, Oman, Nepal, Macao

GROUP 5: Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Yemen, Cambodia

GROUP 6: South Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong

GROUP 7: Kuwait, Lebanon, Singapore

GROUP 8: China, Turkmenistan, Vietnam, Tajikistan

GROUP 9: Iraq, Kazakhstan, Pakistan

GROUP 10: Qatar, India, Sri Lanka, Philippines

Group winners to be drawn into two groups of five. Top two in each group will go into semi-finals. Two semi-final winners qualify while losers will play off. The winners will qualify and the losers will play off against Oceania winner.

OCEANIA

(winners to play off with fourth-best Asian team)

MELANESIAN GROUP: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu

POLYNESIAN GROUP: Cook Islands, Tonga, Western Samoa. Melanesian group winner will go into second round with winner of playoff between Melanesian runner-up and Polynesian winner.

SECOND ROUND GROUP 1: Australia, Tahiti, winner playoff.

GROUP 2: New Zealand, Fiji, winner Melanesia.

THIRD ROUND: Winner Group 1 plays off with winner Group 2. Winner plays off against fourth best Asian team to qualify.

LAZIO'S NEW HOPE

Paul Okon is set to make his mark on Serie A. He spoke to Patrick Mangan.

Paul Okon's transfer from Club Bruges to Italian giants Lazio has made him arguably the highest paid footballer in Australia's history, but he knows the reputation he established in Belgium counts

nothing in Serie A. His family is in Rome with him as a support work and, as his mum explained before he spoke to Soccer Australia, "Italians don't rate the Belgian league very highly. It doesn't seem fazed, however, and although his new club suddenly decided pre-season they want to play him in midfield rather than in his more accustomed sweeper position, it's all just part of the job when you're a highly-paid professional with one of the top sides in Italy."

Then the fact that he's the first English-speaking import at Lazio since the infamous Paul Gascoigne shipped his enigmatic talents back to the British Isles doesn't ruffle the feathers of the Romans' newest recruit. "The only characteristic I have similar to Gascoigne is being able to play in midfield," he laughs. "That'd be about it."

So although Aussie soccer fans can't look forward to seeing Okon dye his hair blond or don a pair of fake breasts at an airport, we can expect to see the 24-year-old former Marconi player in action for Australia during the France 1998 qualifiers.

"I don't know exactly what the calendar for international matches is," says Paul, "but I'm available to play for Australia, so I just hope that when they schedule the matches there shouldn't be too many problems."

But Okon sounds a warning to people who expect soccer's problems in Australia to be solved merely by the Socceroos making it into the final 32. "Actually just the qualifying won't be enough. Because of the large number of teams that will qualify for France, it's just as important to do well in the finals as it is to qualify."

"It's no use qualifying for France and then not having a good tournament. The only way we can achieve anything, or increase the fame of Australian soccer is by doing well in the tournament. That'll take a lot of hard work, but everything's possible."

Australia's footballing reputation in Europe is clearly important to the four-times-capped Socceroo.

"We still carry the tag in Europe of being a semi-professional soccer country," he admits, "which is a bit frustrating, because there are a lot of Australians

"The only characteristic I have similar to Gascoigne is being able to play in midfield," he laughs. "That'd be about it."

playing here and making a

name for themselves

up until the age of 19 or 20, as

Australians are as good as, if not better than, anyone. We've got the European skill and technique, together with the Australian do or die mentality, and those things put together have always helped Australian players to do well in Europe."

Okon's European odyssey, which began when Club Bruges snapped him up in the wake of Australia's brilliant fourth place finish at the 1991 World Youth Championships, has been one of almost constant success, marked by only the occasional low.

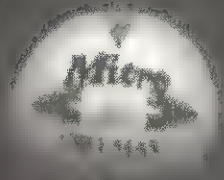
His controversial decision to retire from the national team (albeit only for 12 months) in the middle of the Socceroos' 1993 World Cup qualifying campaign has to be seen in retrospect as a wise decision. At the time he wasn't established in the Bruges first team and felt that disappearing to the southern hemisphere for an extended period might have spelt the end of his career at the Belgian club.

Okon put his head down and set about cementing a career in Belgium. He missed the chance to play for Australia against Maradona's Argentina, but quickly became installed as a Bruges regular and his consistently good form attracted an \$8 million bid (rejected by his club) from German side Stuttgart in 1994.

The only other major obstacle for the skilful defender/midfielder was a cruciate ligament injury sustained in January of this year, cruelly just a matter of weeks after he'd claimed the title of Belgium's Player of the Year. But as Okon told Soccer Australia during his recuperation, "I aim to be around in the game for another ten years. This injury certainly isn't going to hold me up too much." The Lazio newcomer's clairvoyant powers obviously didn't let him down and his rise to prominence as perhaps Australia's most successful soccer export continues unabated.

Brisbane Strikers coach and former Bari and Club Bruges striker Frank Fanna ("Fanna was, and still is, my biggest inspiration," says Okon) predicted many moons ago that his former Marconi club-mate would one day play for AC Milan and recent events haven't made him change his mind. This time Okon isn't making any predictions, but he does have plans for the more distant future. "It's difficult to say exactly now, in terms of when and what and where," he ponders, "but my ambition is to stay in the game at a coaching level. If that's in Australia it would be fantastic to put something back into the game back home."

In the mean time, soccer fans in Australia will have to be satisfied with seeing Paul making an indelible mark in the most glamorous league in the world.





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BROTHERS ON THE BALL

Aurelio Vidmar's transfer to Tenerife is a dream come true for the 29 year old Socceroo. **Frank Pangallo** spoke to him about his move to Spain and also caught up with both Aurelio and brother Tony at their Adelaide home earlier in the European off-season.

It's the end of another summer's day in Tenerife, shimmering playground of the young, rich, famous and gawking tourists. As the scorching Spanish sun sinks like a huge orange fireball into the Mediterranean, new arrival Aurelio Vidmar checks into his lavish hotel to await his latest calling to one of the world's major soccer leagues.

"It's not Italy...but it's close," Aurelio laughs down the line. "It's a great chance and something I hadn't expected so quickly. But I'm not going to let it go!"

Vidmar got a hint that something was up on the Spanish front just before he headed to Atlanta for the Olyroos' disappointing Olympic campaign.

"They'd heard about the year I had in Switzerland and came to see me play, but I didn't get the final nod until we were in Atlanta," he nonchalantly recalls.

"It's a good deal. They like the way I play and wanted me to sign for three years. You can't say no to an opportunity like that, because the Spanish league ranks pretty well close to the Italian Serie A.

"I am ready to work harder than I ever have because this is the sort of opportunity that doesn't come along again. I want to do well and hopefully finish my professional career in Europe on a high note with the World Cup."

If Tenerife had any doubts about whether Vidmar would be up to the class they're used to, they would have been instantly dismissed the moment he took to the pitch in Florida. Clearly, he was Australia's best player in what could only be classed as an anti-climax for Eddie Thomson, Les Scheinflug and Raul Blanco's ordinary lot of performers.

The Spaniards were especially impressed with Aurelio's virtuoso performance against their own team and credited him mostly for Australia's blistering start in that final heart-breaking first round match. The truth of it is

that the Spanish bench couldn't hide its glee when the destructive Vidmar was inexplicably trotted off the field with the Aussies still in the lead.

The former Adelaide City forward says heat and fatigue didn't help but finds it hard to mask his disappointment at not leading the

"It's not Italy...but it's close. It's a great chance and something I hadn't expected so quickly. But I'm not going to let it go!"

Olyroos into the next round.

"There was a lot of expectation and I guess the pressure proved too much for some," he says.

Vidmar is looking forward to his new club although it means being further away from his younger brother Tony, who's in Holland. You won't find fiercer Aussie partisans than the Adelaide-born and bred brothers-in-arms.

Aurelio wants to keep the captaincy for the next World Cup. Tony wants to be there

alongside his brother, as he has in the few internationals they've played together over the past three years. But, as they implored when they both spoke to Soccer Australia a few weeks earlier, things have to change quickly.

Aurelio: It's terrible. We don't play enough games.

Tony: Football is in Europe for most of us and it's just too far away.

Is there any solution?

Aurelio: It's difficult to say. We don't want to enter Europe like Israel did. We wouldn't stand a chance. Everyone's talking about us joining Asia but I don't know about that either. I can't see a solution in my playing time or Tony's. We play two or three internationals a year. That's not enough and our ranking won't ever go up, especially when we don't win games.

We assembled for the Scotland game (at Hampden Park in March) two or three days before the match. Half of us had never played together before. While we knew half of the other guys – you know, how they play – you can't have a tough training session because you've got a club to go back to immediately after. You can only keep fresh and go through a few moves. Continuity is nil.

The thing is we can't get away. They wanted us to go to Chile after Scotland. We were two weeks away from the end of our season, Tony's team was playing for a place in Europe and others were in relegation and promotion battles. The clubs won't allow you to leave at such a crisis point in the season.

Tony: The timing of the Chile game was just shocking. They seem to be snapping up games without thinking.

So, do we have to expect the overseas-based Socceroos to get together only in Europe before crucial qualifiers here?



Aurelio representing the International Travellers



The Vidmar family: Back row: dad Frank (left), sister Silvana, mum Maria. Middle row: Aurelio and Tony. Front row: saying no attention - Layla.

Tony: That's the only way and that should be the format for the next World Cup. Games should have been organised from six months ago.

Australia's path to the '98 finals in France appear to have been made easier by pitting the Oceania winner in a play-off against the fourth-placed Asian country. However, the Vidmars say the optimism should be tempered with caution.

Aurelio: I don't think we have the same back-up of local players as we did in 1993. You need the type like Alex Tobin and Mehmet Durakovic to be there when your overseas players can't for some reason.

Tony: A lot of people are banking on the overseas players getting us through, but it can be tough going if we lose key players, like Paul Okon or Ned Zelic, through injury.

Aurelio: There's no such thing as an easy international anymore. Countries like San Marino and the USA are playing 10 times more than we do. We're sitting around doing nothing while they're improving all the time.

Tony: Look at South Africa. Two years ago when they were here we hammered them. They play internationals galore and are now the African champions. They were below us in the rankings. Now they're 20th! Please!

Don't get me wrong. On the field there are no problems with us. It's off the field where we can't get our act together. I think we're going backwards and nothing much has changed in 10 years. Another thing is they (SA) don't liaise enough with the players overseas. Often we don't find out about games until the last minute.

To punctuate their point, Aurelio claimed the first he'd heard about the True Blues vs International Travellers series was reading about it in the newspapers!

Nonetheless both had extremely satisfying seasons in Europe in 1995/96.

Aurelio capped off his half-season stint in Switzerland by finishing as Sion's top goal scorer with 14 goals in 16 games and became the team's Cup hero in snatching victory from the jaws of defeat with a glory-goal in the dying stages of the Swiss Cup final.

The elation at the end of the season helped erase his disappointment and frustration of the first year into a three year contract with Holland's Feyenoord. Coach Arie Haan (of '74 and '78 World Cup fame) dragged him off the field in his only two first-team appearances. Things looked bleak when he arrived back in Adelaide to spend Christmas with his family.

"When I got back to Amsterdam for a camp, players at the airport told me of a newspaper report quoting the trainer (Haan) that I was no longer required. That's how

you find out about these things, from the bloody newspaper journalists!" recalled Aurelio. "The trainer or club won't say anything direct to you. You hear it through the papers!"

With the reserves competition axed because of Holland's appalling weather, Aurelio could either have sat out the remainder of the season or gone to another club on loan. He opted for the latter and could not have been more happier with his decision.

"Playing for the Olyroos was a big factor in my decision. I needed to be in goal scoring form to make it easier for Eddie

especially from newspapers. They go a lot easier on you than those sharks in Holland," he chuckled.

Tony, 25, concedes he wasn't ready for Europe when he signed with Ekeren three years ago. After a wretched season, he returned to Adelaide City where his ability and skills flourished to the point where he was now a first-choice on the left flank in the Socceroo defence. His brilliant understanding and combination with Aurelio resulted in a memorable goal against Argentina in Sydney in 1993. It also sparked renewed interest from overseas clubs and after more glory with the Zebras, he went to Holland in 1994.

"I'm loving it," smiled Tony (known to his brother as 'Spike' - the nickname given him by former Zebras coach Zoran Marjanovic, a short-cropped hair cut has stuck!). "I was mature enough the first time. This time I knew it was time to go and from day one it's been good... the club, the players and the fans."

"Defensively I've learned a lot. There are three strikers over here and no sweeper so it's all man to man stuff. You've got to be behind you so you're always taking on the forwards."

"I can't wait to get back. I want to be a much better in the next season."

The brothers were quick to acknowledge the help and encouragement they've received from Socceroo father-figure Graham Arnold.

"He's just the greatest bloke. He's been there for every one of us who have come over", they both enthused.

Said Tony: "He's always there to listen, give advice or pick you up. And he's still a great player who hasn't got the credit he deserves."

And Aurelio was quick to dismiss any criticism of Arnie's goal-scoring drought with the Socceroos.

"They love him over there. You can guarantee you'll get 12-15 goals in a season from him."

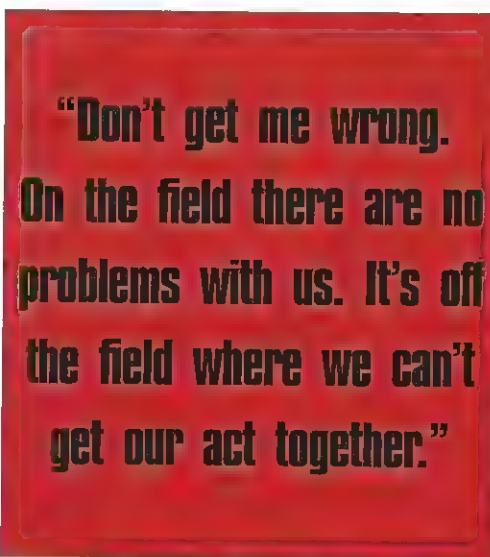
"He was a prolific goal scorer at Sydney United. Under Frank Arok, he scored 15 goals in 30 matches for Australia. He's scored 2 or 3 under Eddie and I think it's because the system we play doesn't suit him."

"He's not one for chasing defenders running into corners. You have to play to his feet. He's just not getting the service."

Arnold will still be there for both of them next season but it may well be his last in Europe before returning to Australia.

As for the Vidmar brothers, they're still where they want to be when Europe is finished for them. Back home relaxing in Adelaide and donning the famous black and white stripes for the Adelaide City Zebras.

"No doubt about it," smiled Aurelio. "I want to finish where I started and have Sion there with me," he winked. ■



Thomson to pick me," Aurelio said.

"With Feyenoord I'd played just three games in six months. For a professional, it's not good enough. With Sion I played in every league and Cup game of the rest of the season and I scored goals."

Sion finished second, five points behind arch rival Grasshoppers, but thanks to Aurelio's opportunism in front of goal, they will at least contest next season's European Cup Winners' Cup.

And to repay their gratitude, Sion wanted to buy him outright. But the prospect of a move to Spain proved too alluring to turn down.

He admits his five years on the Continent have been a roller-coaster ride. A big downer in his first year with Belgium's Kortrijk came as the club was relegated. He was up the next year when Waregem qualified for Europe and down again when they too were relegated. A high with Standard Liege was next as they not only made Europe but Aurelio finished as their top marksman, in a season in which they failed by a single point to take the Belgian championship. The move to Feyenoord last year looked like being a total wipeout until Sion came along.

"I am enjoying my football more," he said. "Switzerland isn't big on soccer so there's less stress and pressure on you,

THE BIG GUNS

by Angelo Sticca

Atalanta

Signings: Mrkovic (Partizan), Carrera (Juventus), Inzaghi (Parma), Persson (Malmo), Micillo (Cesena), Rossini (Piacenza), Magallanes (Penarol), Sotti (Fiorentina).
Departures: Ferron (Sampdoria), Vieri & Montero (Juventus), Tovaieri (Reggiana), Paganin (Verona), Pavone (Bologna).
Coach: Mondonico.

Bologna

Signings: Bresciani (Foggia), Pavone (Atalanta), Fontolan (Inter), Marocchi (Juventus), Andersson (Bari), Kolyanov (Foggia).
Departures: Marchioro (Portsmouth), Pergolizzi (Brescia), Bosi (Ascoli).
Coach: Ulivieri.

Cagliari

Signings: Lonstrup (Copenhagen), Tinkler (Setubal), Banchelli (Fiorentina), Vega (Grasshoppers).
Departures: Firicano, Pusceddu & Oliveira (Fiorentina), Venturin (Lazio).
Coach: Perez.

Fiorentina

Signings: Firicano, Pusceddu & Oliveira (Cagliari), Falcone (Torino).
Departures: Banchelli (Cagliari), Sotti (Atalanta), Orlando (Udinese), Zanetti (Venezia).
Coach: Ranieri.

Inter Milan

Signings: Djorkaeff (Paris SG), Angioma (Torino), Winter (Lazio), Zamorano (Real Madrid), Sforza (Bayern Munich), Kanu (Ajax).
Departures: Carlos (Real Madrid), Caio (Napoli), Fontolan (Bologna), Orlandini (Verona), Bianchi (Cesena).
Coach: Hodgson.

Juventus

Signings: Vieri & Montero (Atalanta), Boksic (Lazio), Amoroso (Padova), Zidane (Bordeaux).
Departures: Vialli (Chelsea), Ravanello (Middlesbrough), Sousa (Borussia Dortmund), Vierchowod (Perugia), Carrera (Atalanta), Marocchi (Bologna).
Coach: Lippi.

Lazio

Signings: Fish (Orlando Pirates), Okon (Bruges), Protti (Bari), Buso (Napoli).
Departures: Boksic (Juventus), Winter (Inter), Di Matteo (Chelsea).
Coach: Zeman.

Milan

Signings: Davids, Reiziger (Ajax), Dugarry (Bordeaux), Pagotto (Sampdoria).
Departures: Futre (West Ham), Di Canio (Celtic), Donadoni (Metrostars), Sordo (Reggiana).
Coach: Tabet.

Napoli

Signings: Crasson (Anderlecht), Caio (Inter), Esposito (Lazio).
Departures: Buso (Lazio), Pari (Piacenza), Pizzi (Parma).
Coach: Simoni.

The Italian Serie A season has finally kicked off and while the spotlight has been cast upon the English Premier League and its influx of foreign talent, most of the Italian clubs have also been involved in hectic player recruitment over the off-season.



After the first round of matches last month some of the bigger names in the Serie A showed their worth by contributing to important first-up victories for their respective sides.

Inter's Sforza scored the winner in the clash against Udinese, Chiesa contributed a goal in Parma's 3-0 win over Napoli, Christian Vieri took only six minutes to score his first goal for Juventus while Vicenza's Otero rattled up an incredible four goals in his side's 4-2 thumping of the highly-fancied Fiorentina.

On a sad note, Inter's signing of Nigerian Kanu from Ajax was thrown into turmoil when it was revealed the young champion has a major heart ailment which will more than likely end his soccer career. Kanu, who led Nigeria to Olympic gold in Atlanta, was set to be one of the revelations of the Serie A and an integral part of Inter's push for the Scudetto.

Meanwhile, San Siro co-tenants AC Milan will be without the services of 36-year-old Franco Baresi for up to two months after he sustained an injury in the Coppa Italia. Surprisingly, Milan decided to fill his position with the signing of Pietro Vierchowod, who had only just transferred to Perugia from Juventus in the off-season. No one can doubt Vierchowod's experience, but at the age of 37, the question must be asked - has he found the fountain of youth or is AC Milan intent on making Juventus pay for discarding the veteran of over 16 Serie A campaigns?

Parma

Signings: Bravo (Paris SG), Chiesa (Sampdoria), Crespo (River Plate), Pizzi (Napoli).
Departures: Couto (Glasgow Rangers), Inzaghi (Atalanta), Pin (Piacenza), Di Chiara (Perugia).
Coach: Ancelotti.

Perugia

Signings: Vierchowod (Juventus), Kreek (Padova), Di Chiara (Parma), Rapajc (Hajduk).
Departures: Beghetto (Vicenza), Pierotti (Cosenza), Suppa (Lucchese).
Coach: Galeone.

Piacenza

Signings: Pari (Napoli), Pin (Parma), Tentoni (Cremonese).
Departures: Caccia, Turrini (Napoli), Rossini (Atalanta).
Coach: Muti.

Reggiana

Signings: Hatz (Vienna), Sordo (Milan), Grun (Anderlecht), Tovaieri (Atalanta), Valencia (Independiente).
Departures: Strada (Parma), Cevo (Torino).
Coach: Lucescu.

Roma

Signings: Dahlin (Borussia M), Trotta (Velez), Grossi (Vicenza).
Departures: Giannini (Sturm Graz), Cherubini (Reggiana).
Coach: Bianchi.

Sampdoria

Signings: Lagle (Lens), Ferron (Atalanta), Veron (Boca Juniors).
Departures: Chiesa (Parma), Seedorf (Real Madrid), Zenga (Padova), Pagotto (Milan).
Coach: Eriksson.

Udinese

Signings: Amoroso (Guarani), Tentoni, Turci (Cremonese), Orlando (Fiorentina).
Departures: Ametrano (Juventus), Stefani (Cremonese), Mauro (Reggiana).
Coach: Zaccheroni.

Verona

Signings: Orlandini (Inter), Nouma (Paris SG), Reinaldo (Palmeiras), Paganini (Atalanta).
Departures: Zanini (Sampdoria), Di Vaio (Lazio), Tommasi (Roma).
Coach: Cagni.

Vicenza

Signings: Wome (Canon Yaounde), Iannuzzi (Lazio).
Departures: Grossi (Roma), Bjorklund (Glasgow Rangers).
Coach: Guidolin.



ARSENE TO ARSENAL

World Footballer of the Year George Weah calls him the greatest coach in the world, but most English fans have never heard of him. His managerial skills took Monaco to a French championship victory, but he's most recently been employed in the footballing outpost of

by **patrick mangan**

under mysterious circumstances a handful of days before the start of the new season brought the predictable 'Crisis at Highbury' headlines out of mothballs again after a turbulent couple of years at the club.

Ironically, Rioch's Arsenal reign had seemed to be off to a solid start. The arrival last summer of the high profile Dennis Bergkamp and David Platt, and the subsequent 5th place finish in the Premiership - high enough to secure a spot in the 1996-97 UEFA Cup - was apparently a satisfactory beginning, setting the former Scottish international up for a lengthy spell in the Highbury hot-seat. The explanation of the Arsenal board for Rioch's demise was murky at best, although the club's failure during the close-season to lure any of the glamour players the Gunners would need to mount a Premiership challenge was almost certainly a factor. Alan Shearer, Hristo Stoichkov, Gary McAllister, Christian Karembeu and Les Ferdinand were among a host of stars linked with the club in the summer. But surprisingly, in spite of Rioch having an

excited the English media in particular. It seems that anyone who's ever got a game with France, or played under the French coach, or possibly anyone who's ever whistled a Maurice Chevalier song to themselves in the shower, might come under consideration for a transfer to Highbury.

Liberian international and ex-Paris St-Germain star, George Weah, and Newcastle United's wizard of the wing, David Ginola are the first cabs off the rumour rank. AC Milan forward Weah has recently been interviewed on Arsenal's 'Clubcall' line, professing his admiration for Wenger, who brought the African striker to France during his days at the helm of Monaco. The fact Weah is already playing for one of the biggest clubs in the world is unlikely to stop the speculation in the tabloids.

Ginola would be a controversial acquisition for the London club. Roundly jeered by the Arsenal crowd after being sent off in a League Cup tie for Newcastle at Highbury last season, he was reportedly unhappy with the physical treatment he received from the Gunners defence in a 1995 European Cup Winners Cup semi-final during his own Paris St-Germain days. The entire back four from that European tie are still on Arsenal's books.

Money to burn or not, Wenger's task is daunting one. The club has been constantly in the wars in recent years with a succession of well-documented dramas.

Since 1994, Arsenal has suffered everything from the drug addiction of midfield star Paul Merson to the sacking of manager George Graham for accepting 'gifts' as a percentage of transfer fees. Striker Ian Wright, Arsenal's top scorer in each of the last five seasons, was on the verge of leaving the club after a dispute with Rioch earlier this year, and in the wake of Rioch's departure, Bergkamp has expressed concern about where the Gunners are heading.

Wenger brings with him to Highbury an outstanding coaching pedigree, but he'll need every gram of his French guile to lift Arsenal back to the heights they reached in the middle of Graham's reign. Championship victories in 1989 and 1991 set a standard for the club that they've failed to reach since, and as the Premier League gets wealthier and Manchester United, Liverpool and Newcastle move from strength to corporate strength, the price of failure for a club as big as Arsenal becomes ever more stark. ■



Ian Wright - was unhappy at Arsenal earlier this year.

Nagoya in Japan. He is Arsene Wenger and he's the new manager of Arsenal Football Club.

Wenger arrives at Arsenal in the shadow of a difficult time for the Londoners. The sacking of previous manager Bruce Rioch

alleged \$A30 million spending money burning a hole in his pocket, ageing goalkeeper John Lukic was the only new face at Highbury as the final week of the close-season began. Then - exit Bruce Rioch.

The highly-respected Wenger's installation as Arsenal manager has already

ITALIAN STRIKE FORCE

on english soil

Lazio midfielder Roberto di Matteo's move to Chelsea in the northern summer made him the first current Italian international to transfer to an English club, but it was the arrival of Juventus' European Champions League-winning strike force, Gianluca Vialli and Fabrizio Ravanelli, on the fair island that's really captivated the locals.

On the face of it, the notion of the best team in Europe selling its two main forwards to a couple of middle of the road English teams is preposterous, but there was certainly some method to Juve's madness.

In Vialli's case, clinching the Champions League in May meant that the chrome-tomed striker had effectively achieved everything there was for him at club level, and the idea of a new challenge, and a foreign one at that, was hard to resist.

Add to the equation the fact that Vialli had been taking English lessons for the previous 12 months, and that his ex-Sampdoria team-mate and international superstar and indred spirit, Ruud Gullit, had recently been appointed manager of Chelsea, and the pieces begin to fit together more neatly.

Ravanelli's English settlement was more

controversial. The scorer of the goal that secured Juventus' 1-1 draw (and subsequent penalty shootout victory) against Ajax in the Euro final, Ravanelli was clearly appalled at being substituted later in that game, angrily snatching his tracksuit top from a trainer and shouting at coach Lippi as he departed the scene.

The Juve board of directors may have taken a dim view of Ravanelli's show of temper and, given the club's newly-established policy of financial conservatism, when Middlesbrough's \$A14 million offer came through on the fax, it might have seemed like a good deal for all concerned.

Italian fans, contemplating the miserly references of an average Serie A club

compared with their English Premier League counterparts, would have predicted the outcome. Both Vialli and the 'White Feather' Ravanelli have got off to flying starts with their relatively-unfancied teams.

Vialli opened his account in his third outing with the Blues and has looked venomous in front of goal. But so far it's been Ravanelli who's grabbed the headlines, courtesy of an opening-day hat-trick against

is still adjusting to a new footballing culture, though. After his hat-trick against Liverpool he expressed amazement that a three goal haul hadn't been enough to win the match. This wouldn't have happened in Italy, he said.

Equally novel to Ravanelli was an incident in his third game for the north-east



four time European Cup winners, Liverpool. Three goals in the following four games underlined his class.

Neither striker is showing any signs of footballing homesickness, and as Vialli looks around the Stamford Bridge ground and sees the Dutchman Gullit, Romanian Dan Petrescu, France's Franck le Boeuf and fellow Italian di Matteo on the park, it wouldn't seem far removed from the cosmopolitan lineups of his previous clubs, Sampdoria and Juventus. Equally, Ravanelli has the Brazilians, Juninho, Branco and Emerson for international company. The previously xenophobic English league isn't so daunting for a 'continental' these days.

The silver-haired Middlesbrough striker

club. After he was fouled by Nottingham Forest defender, Nikola Jerkan, he'd appealed to the referee to book his opponent.

After the game he was contrite. "It was something that might be done in Italy, but I appreciate it is not done in England," he explained. "I am sorry it happened and I certainly won't do it again. I want to apologise to Nikola and the Forest fans."

Ravanelli, and to a lesser extent his more experienced compatriot Vialli, may have a thing or two to learn from their English cousins. But judging by the form of the dynamic duo so far, their hosts may ultimately be the ones who feel that they've had the benefit of the footballing master class. ■



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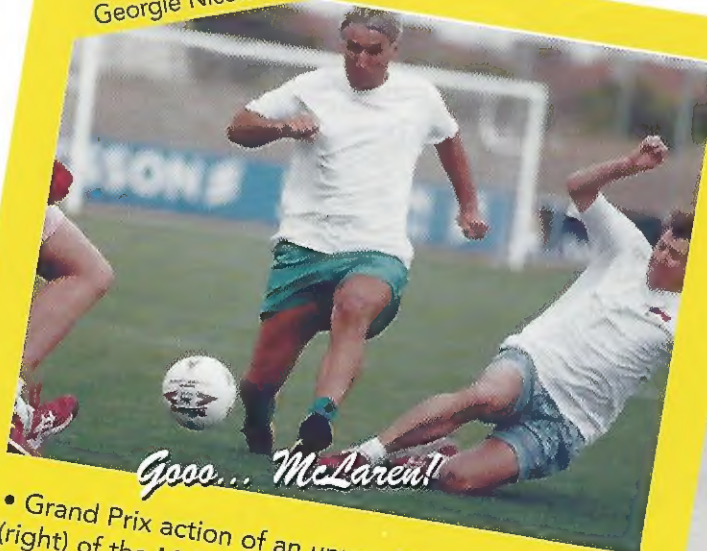
• Gala day at Doncaster Rovers Soccer Club in Victoria. 450 boys took part in the two day carnival which featured competitions for under-8, under-9, under-10 and under-11 age groups.

Here is the victorious Doncaster under-9 team. Pictured from left to right: Back row - Yusuf Laher, Tim Karagianis, Nicholas Curtis, Peter Gavalas. Front row - Alexander Ross, Matthew Kabastanakis, Georgie Nicolau, Michael Hargitay.



*See you soon in Australia.
Cino Patrick*

• Avid Soccer Australia reader Patrick Benhamou is the Managing Director for the French Government Tourist Office in Canada. He's pictured with his three sons. Are they future French international soccer stars?



Go... McLaren!

• Grand Prix action of an unusual kind. Nick Butler (right) of the McLaren team gets a tackle in on the Jordan team's Paul Thompson before last year's Australian Grand Prix.

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